

Emily K Stickler  
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Recruitment Efforts on Digital and Social Media Channels for MBA Programming  
at the Carlson School: A Case Study

Emily K Stickler

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Introduction/Background.....	7
Literature Review.....	9
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	13
Methods.....	14
Results.....	17
Discussion.....	24
Recommendations.....	25
Limitations and Future Research.....	27
Works Cited.....	29
Appendix A: Interview Transcriptions.....	30
Appendix B: Focus Group Transcriptions.....	48
Appendix C: Content Analysis Data Sheets.....	59
Appendix D: Carlson School of Management PTMBA Student Experience Mapping.....	65

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### **About the Author**

The researcher, Emily Stickler, works in digital marketing and communications for the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. She holds a bachelor's of arts from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities in journalism, mass communication and Spanish studies. She previously held positions at Hazelden, where she worked as a marketing manager and executive communications writer, and Target, where she worked on their social business strategy team.

In her role at the Carlson School, the researcher provides strategic direction for social media and digital channels that support the School's brand as well as its sub-brands including programs, departments, faculty, centers and institutes. She serves as the consistent voice for School-wide use of social media, generates social content and reports on campaign efficacy and success. She also coaches internal partners on brand standards and social strategies.

Her immediate career goals focus on marketing and advertising more effectively to the current Carlson School student population through social story-telling as well as streamlining recruitment efforts on digital media channels for the School. Long-term career goals for the researcher include advancing into higher leadership positions in the marketing and communications field while advocating for mission-driven brands. Advocating for the advancement of education through marketing communication and public relations efforts at the Carlson School are well aligned with this.

This research is the capstone project for the professional M.A. in strategic communication through the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota –

Twin Cities, of which the researcher is a 2014 candidate. Her research focuses on the recruitment opportunities for and efficacy of Carlson School MBA programming on digital and social media.

## **Introduction/Background**

The Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota is a business school with an established reputation for having some of the best undergraduate, graduate and PhD business degrees in the world. They typically receive far more applications than they accept, and because of this, have done little to proactively recruit top talent using digital marketing and advertising in recent years. Proactively recruiting through marketing and advertising efforts on digital and social channels could increase the number of applications received, but could also increase the quality of the applications received, both of which would have a positive impact on the MBA program rankings and the Carlson School's reputation as a whole.

Additionally, and on more general terms, it is becoming increasingly important for institutions in higher education to communicate differential value propositions that define the benefits that graduates can anticipate from their degree. Prospective students are more and more concerned about the weight that their degree carries in addition to the curriculum, facilities, faculty and services for students (Durkin, McKenna and Cummins, 2012). And influencing perspective students is very complex due to the substantial time and monetary investment associated with pursuing a higher education degree (Ivy, 2008). Combined, these factors suggest a very complex marketing opportunity for MBA program recruitment, one that must not be overlooked.

As other top business schools around the world, including many of the Carlson School's top competitors, are differentiating themselves from the competition by employing recruitment campaigns using digital and social media, the Carlson School is finding itself at a crossroads of deciding whether or not to commit funds to recruitment efforts using digital marketing and advertising or continuing to rely on their established reputation in the industry to differentiate.

Currently, the MBA program at the Carlson School employs an annual digital advertising campaign that primarily consists of banner ads and retargeting efforts, but has not executed paid social media advertising. Some organic social media marketing has been incorporated to annual advertising efforts, but it has been executed on an ad hoc basis, and not as a component of a larger strategy.

Because of this, credible and substantial research is necessary to determine whether these recruitment efforts would be beneficial. For the purposes of this research, the researcher will focus on the Carlson School's core MBA offerings, which include the part-time and full-time MBA programs. It will be critical to determine exactly who part-time and full-time MBA prospective students are, and how they are information searching for MBA program options. Additionally, in order to obtain buy-in from the Carlson School's MBA leadership, marketing and advertising efforts for recruitment need to be effective, especially with the limited budget available to a public educational institution. And in order for these efforts to be effective, it is crucial to understand the target demographics of part-time and full-time MBA candidates in order to reach these audiences efficiently on digital and social media channels. This led the author to the initial hypothesis that full-time MBA and part-time MBA students are information searching differently for their respective programming because they are, at least on the surface, different audiences who are looking for a very different educational experience.

This research will explore what the differences are between full-time and part-time MBA candidates and how marketing and advertising efforts, especially on social and digital media, may effectively play a role in recruitment. The findings are supported by original research, Carlson School research, and marketing theory.

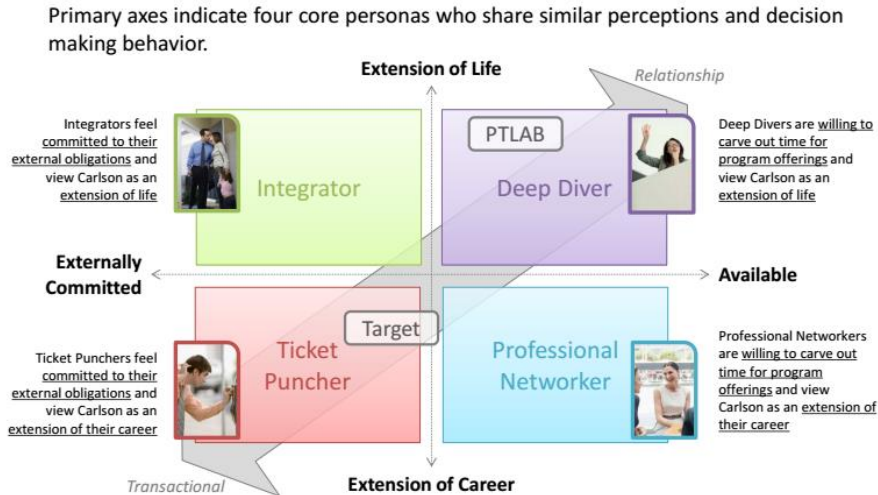


## Literature Review

This research attempts to address the following questions with help from the subsequent readings, theories and other materials.

This author is interested in both the full-time and part-time MBA populations and recruitment efforts for both. She will first address how prospective MBA students are information searching for MBA programming. How and where do prospective full-time MBA candidates information search? And how does this differ from part-time candidates?

To determine whether prospective students are, in fact, information searching in different ways, it is critical to better understand the demographics of these two audiences. The *Carlson Ventures Enterprise Part-Time MBA Student Experience Mapping* found in Appendix D, which is a comprehensive review of the part-time MBA student population and their wants, needs and expectations with their part-time MBA experience at the Carlson School, dissects the part-time MBA student population on a variety of levels. The findings from the mapping report help to identify and address pain points within the part-time MBA program as well as the key differentiators for the program to help the Carlson School better manage student expectations. According to the mapping report, there are four behavioral archetypes that make up the part-time MBA student population. By understanding these archetypes, this author may then determine potential ways in which the full-time MBA population is information searching in different ways for full-time MBA programming and how it differs from that of the part-time candidate population. The four archetypes include integrators, deep divers, ticket punchers and professional networkers, and are defined as follows:



Knowing what the key differentiators are for these four archetypes help to better speculate what specific information the part-time MBA audience is looking for when information searching.

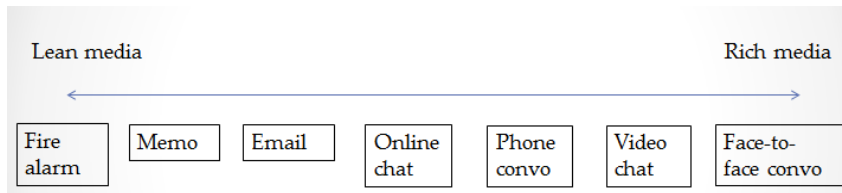
Understanding where this audience is information searching will be better understood through the author's focus groups with full-time and part-time Carlson School MBA students, as well as through informational interviews with Carlson School staff members involved with recruitment efforts.

Also relevant to this study is determining why students are choosing the Carlson School for their part-time or full-time MBA experiences. How does the Carlson School differentiate itself from the rest of the MBA program competition? With understanding that differentiators will vary depending on the student, it is still important to understand what the main selling points, and conversely, pain points, are for MBA programming at the Carlson School, in order to determine the likelihood that digital and social messaging for recruitment efforts will actually impact behavior.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior states that human behavior is guided by behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs, and each component forms attitudes towards the behavior,

subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, n.d.). In combination, these components lead to a formation of behavioral intention. The researcher seeks to better understand the likelihood that digital and social messaging for recruitment efforts will impact their behavior to apply or not apply to the Carlson School MBA programming. The Theory of Planned Behavior's behavioral belief, which explains the probability that a behavior will produce a given outcome as defined by the attitude toward the belief, or the degree to which the action is viewed positively or negatively by the participant, may contribute to better understanding how social and digital messaging could impact recruitment efforts, especially as it relates to targeting social and digital efforts to key audiences who are more likely to be interested in pursuing an MBA (Ajzen, n.d.).

As stated in Taft and Lengel's Media Richness Theory, the choice of a communication function is based primarily on the possibility for multiple interpretations of the message; essentially, that the medium must be of an appropriate richness for the message to be received accurately (Clampitt, 2010). Because online communication environments complicate the potential interpretations for messages, it begs the question regarding whether digital and social media environments are a rich enough medium to effectively convey MBA recruitment messages to prospective students. Social media is a richer medium than other forms of digital media, for example, due to its opportunity for two-way communication with the brand. But both still skew toward the lean media side of the Media Richness Model below. The model is organized based on the message's capacity for instant feedback; ability to convey multiple communication cues; capacity for nonverbal communication, including facial expressions and other body language; and the potential to tailor the messages to personal circumstances (Cheney et. al., 2010).



This theory suggests that messages that are intended to influence and persuade may require a richer medium to be effectively received (Cheney et. al., 2010). Because of this, recruitment campaigns solely facilitated on digital and social media channels may prove to be ineffective without integration with richer media.

It is also relevant to the researcher's study to note that current recruitment efforts for the part-time and full-time MBA programs at the Carlson School are largely facilitated by phone and in-person conversations: both rich media that have proven effective for recruitment efforts according to the MBA office at the Carlson School.

While not directly applicable to recruitment efforts using digital and social media communications, the researcher will leverage research done on the topic of cause marketing and communications efforts for brands as much of it relates to how the Carlson School may effectively market their "cause" (MBA programming) and the importance of compatibility of messaging between the brand and the cause (Samu & Wymer, 2010). The research results of a study published in the *Journal of Business Research* found that a higher perceived fit between the organization and the cause led to a more positive attitude toward the cause and the organization as well as an increased intent to buy (Samu & Wymer, 2010). Samu and Wymer's research supports the need of marketing and communications efforts for MBA recruitment on digital and social media to be created as a compatible message with the rest of the Carlson School's efforts. Additionally, Hoeffler and Keller's research on cause marketing in the *Journal*

*of Public Policy & Marketing* explains six means by which cause-based marketing programs can build brand equity for a brand:

1. Building brand awareness
2. Enhancing brand image
3. Establishing brand credibility
4. Evoking brand feelings
5. Creating a sense of brand community
6. Eliciting brand engagement

The research goes on to address what they consider to be the main types of associations that can be drawn from causes marketed by organizations (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). Specifically, the images and performance associated with the cause, and the feelings and opinions evoked by the cause. By having a strong and positive correlation between the images and feelings associated with the cause and the organization's brand promise—rather than a disconnect between the two—the cause marketing program will ultimately find more success (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002). The research also addresses how cause-based marketing programs can be branded effectively and how to choose a good fit for the organization. All of this reinforces the importance of affinity in the role of recruitment, and combined makes this article is a valuable primer for the Carlson School's MBA digital and social recruitment efforts.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This research is based on the following questions:

RQ1: Do prospective part-time and full-time MBA students information search in different ways when deciding on an MBA program?

RQ2: Do prospective full-time and part-time MBA students rely on different information sources?

RQ3: Are digital and social media channels rich enough mediums to be effective as stand-alone recruitment channels for MBA programming?

The literature review above led this author to hypothesize the following: part-time and full-time MBA prospective students information search differently when choosing an MBA program because key differentiators for MBA programming vary for these audiences. Marketing and advertising efforts need to be reflective of these differences, and currently are not, for the most part, reflective of this at the Carlson School. And, lastly, digital and social media channels may not be rich enough mediums to be effective as stand-alone recruitment channels.

## **Methods**

### **Informational Interviews**

This researcher conducted four informational interviews of Carlson School staff members to get their input and perspective on recruitment efforts for MBA programming, both for the part-time and full-time MBA program, as well as the makeup of the perspective student demographic. This researcher conducted the interviews in March and April of 2014. Interviews were conducted with the associate director of student affairs, the director of student affairs, the assistant director of admissions and recruiting, and the director of admissions and recruiting for the part-time and full-time MBA programming at the Carlson School.

Each of the one-hour interviews was conducted at the Carlson School MBA program offices and utilized a similar set of questions, which can be found in Appendix A.

## **Focus Groups**

This researcher also conducted two focus groups in a Carlson School classroom with current Carlson School MBA students. The focus groups were conducted in April of 2014 and were each 45 minutes in length. The focus groups were intended to gain a greater understanding of the differences between part-time and full-time program's experience with the Carlson School, both during the recruitment process and during the program itself. The first focus group was made up of six students between the ages of 25-35 who are currently enrolled in the full-time MBA program. One student had an emphasis in brand management, three with an emphasis on consulting and two with an emphasis on finance. All students had completed at least one year of the program. The second focus group was made up of four students currently enrolled in the part-time MBA program between the ages of 25-31. Three participants worked in the marketing capacity of for-profit organizations in the Twin Cities. One participant was a Carlson School employee working in alumni relations.

Each focus group utilized a similar set of questions, which can be found in Appendix B.

Fellow researcher Bridget Aymar participated in the interviews and focus groups and shared the transcripts for application to a separate capstone, with prior approval from the Strategic Communication Program Director Steve Wehrenberg. Supporting materials, including transcripts, from this researcher's informational interviews and focus groups are listed in Appendix A and Appendix B.

## **Content Analysis**

Lastly, in an effort to better understand how the Carlson School's current social media presence has been playing a role in MBA recruitment efforts, and ultimately to determine whether it will

be a viable recruitment tool in the future, this researcher conducted a content analysis of the Carlson School social recruitment efforts on the MBA program's Facebook page, as well as that of the top 12 business schools in the Carlson School's competitive set as defined by the MBA program office.

The 12 schools included:

- Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)
- Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)
- Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)
- Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)
- McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)
- McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)
- Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)
- Opus School of Business (University of St. Thomas)
- Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)
- Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)
- Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)

The objective of the content analysis was to gain insight into how other schools are currently recruiting MBA students on Facebook and how the Carlson School's efforts compare. Facebook was the chosen due to it being the only social channel that all 12 schools were on. The content analysis was conducted on May 13, 2014, and included the 10 most recent Facebook posts for each school, resulting in 130 pieces of total content. It was coded based on the five characteristics used by University of Minnesota recruitment offices to categorize prospective student communications, which included:

- Location: Facebook post mentions location of the campus, sells location/community
- Value: Facebook post mentions price, scholarships, monetary reference
- Academics: Facebook post mentions staff or faculty, specific programming, USPs
- Opportunities: Facebook post mentions job placement, international experience, extra-curriculars
- Affinity: Facebook post mentions students or alumni through general/otherwise not categorized brand storytelling



These categories were judged by the researcher and MBA program staff to be relevant for this analysis as well. The coding allowed the researcher to better understand how the Carlson School's competitors compare to their current efforts on Facebook. And although the Carlson School does not currently employ strategic social marketing efforts on their MBA Facebook page, this allows the researcher to make realistic recommendations for the future. The content analysis was coded by the researcher and a second coder was consulted for reliability and validity.

Supporting materials, including coding sheets and reliability judgements, from this researcher's content analysis are listed in Appendix C.

## **Results**

### **Informational Interviews and Focus Groups**

Informational interviews with Carlson School staff support the hypothesis that part-time and full-time MBA prospective students information search differently when choosing an MBA program. According to Carlson School staff interviewed by the researcher, part-time MBA and full-time MBA prospective students are not only in search of different information, but have different priorities in MBA program offerings. Full-time candidates are much more attuned to and concerned about business school rankings, for example. They are searching for this information, as well as other information about the business schools that are in their competitive set, primarily through Google searches. This is especially true for potential candidates living outside the Carlson School's region. Full-time candidates typically have a much larger number of potential

MBA programs in their competitive set. Most have done significant online research on more than one MBA program.

Conversely, part-time candidates are concerned about flexibility with work schedules and offerings that set the Carlson School apart from the other MBA competitors within the Twin Cities metro area, and they are searching for this information on the Carlson School website and largely by inquiring in-person at information sessions and with peers in their personal and professional network. The peer-to-peer referral network is especially strong with potential part-time MBA candidates. “They talk. They generally will know someone who went to Carlson or the U, and speak with them,” said Patrick McCarthy, director of student affairs. “Candidates who are local are utilizing their networks. “Did my manager go to Carlson? Do I know someone that went to Carlson?” This matters,” he added.

Informational interviews conducted by this researcher with Carlson School staff found that potential part-time MBA candidates are also largely interested in getting the best financial value for their education. This population wants to know if the Carlson School price-point and tougher programming are worth it. “The question they will constantly ask is, “I’m paying more than St. Thomas, is it worth it?” said Hans Peterson, Carlson School associate director of student affairs. “Once they enroll, they continue to weigh whether they’re getting what they paid for; their satisfaction will be largely based on whether they made the right decision to pay more to come here,” said Hans Peterson. “Once people start diving in, it becomes apparent that we are far and away the best [part-time MBA] program. But it also costs more and takes longer to complete compared to St. Thomas,” said Tedi Mason, Carlson School assistant director of admissions and recruiting. Potential part-time MBA students need to be sold on the value of the Carlson School

programming—and continue to be sold on the value throughout the program according to informational interview findings.

Additionally, and supported by the part-time and full-time MBA focus groups as well as the informational interviews conducted by the researcher, key differentiators for MBA programming are different for each of these audiences, but marketing and communications efforts have typically been bundled together for both programs. “Where we struggle is trying to be everything to everyone,” Linh Gilles, Carlson School director of admissions and recruiting. Identifying the key differentiators and marketing to potential candidates based on the key differentiators is crucial to both the part-time and full-time MBA program’s recruitment success, she said. “We have a unique community here in the Twin Cities that sets us apart. There aren’t a lot of our competitors who can say that their [full-time MBA] campus is flush up against one of the most vibrant business communities in the country,” said Linh Gilles. Location is a key differentiator for the full-time program, but it does have its limitations, she added.

“...The fact that there is a perception that Minnesota is a fly-over state. And not necessarily somewhere that business actually happens. We know it’s not a fly-over state, and so do our current students and alumni, but it does take some nurturing to get prospective students, especially ones who have never been to Minneapolis, to understand this,” Linh Gilles added. In addition to location, the Enterprises are a key differentiator for the full-time program. “Hands down, the Enterprise program is very unique in the MBA market, especially something as robust as we have,” Pat McCarthy said. The Carlson School Enterprise program (offered with an emphasis on marketing, consulting, new ventures or finance) puts full-time MBA students into student-managed teams to address real-world challenges of client businesses which expect real-world results. It is an in-depth professional experience that few other business schools offer.

As for the part-time MBA program, this researcher's informational interviews indicate that the part-time program is sold to potential students more ambiguously. A key differentiator for the part-time program is typically the international experience requirement, but as stated previously, part-time candidates are largely influenced by their network.

The researcher's informational interviews also supported that marketing and advertising efforts need to be reflective of the fact that part-time and full-time MBA candidates represent different populations.

This is also supported in the researcher's focus groups. Although the part-time and full-time MBA focus groups were asked the same questions, their responses were vastly different. Overall, the full-time MBA participants were much more informed with all aspects of the Carlson School than the part-time participants. They expressed a stronger connection with the School and were much more premeditated in their decision process to return to school for an MBA. The full-time MBA focus group participants considered a much larger competitive set of schools than the part-time program participants. Many full-time candidates considered other schools until being sold on an aspect of the full-time MBA program at the Carlson School that stood out from the competitors. Some participants mentioned the Enterprise program or small class size as this key differentiator, or discussions with key influencers in their network or affiliates with the school. The full-time participants expressed a much stronger connection with staff and faculty of the Carlson School—both during the recruitment process and during their MBA program itself. The full-time participants were much more concerned about school rankings than part-time participants were. Full-time participants were not only concerned with general rankings, but specific rankings, such as job placement rankings and job pay for graduates also played a role in their decision.

When asked who the Carlson School would be at a barbeque, the full-time participants expressed much stronger opinions both in terms of the personification of the Carlson School and of its competitors. “[The Carlson School] does something good, but then somebody else beats him: he’ll hit a triple, but then Harvard will come in and hit a home run,” one full-time participant said. Full-time participants also questioned who the competitors would be at the barbeque itself. “I also wonder if Harvard is at our barbeque at all? Like, really? Harvard and Stanford aren’t there. They don’t eat barbeque do they? Maybe if it’s a lobster bake. Kelley, Ross and Olin would be there. Should Harvard even be at the party? We weren’t invited to their party,” another full-time participant stated. Part-time participants weren’t able to name many competitors who would be at the barbeque or expand on what the Carlson School would be like at the barbeque itself. They were able to speculate minimally, but could not articulate it in the depth that the full-time participants did.

One consistent response from both the part-time and full-time participants is that there is not a consistent connection between the school’s communication efforts and students while they’re in their respective MBA program. Both groups felt that the school could do a better job at communicating online during the recruitment process with clear messaging about the MBA program’s offerings.

### **Content Analysis**

The content analysis was coded based on the five characteristics used by University of Minnesota recruitment offices to categorize prospective student communications, which included location, value, academics, opportunities and affinity, as defined previously on page 16. The researcher’s reliability coder, who also coded all data, was fundamentally consistent with the

researcher's content analysis results. Any inconsistencies between the two coders were discussed and a final code was agreed upon.

Overwhelmingly, the most common Facebook post content category in the content analysis was academics (code 3), which referenced staff or faculty, specific programming offerings or other USPs of the school's MBA program. Of the 130 posts analyzed in the content analysis, 52, or 40%, were coded as a 3 for referencing academic content. The second most common content category across all schools was opportunities (code 4), which included posts that mentioned job placement, international experience or other extra-curricular offerings of the school's MBA program. Of the 130 posts analyzed, 37, or 28%, were coded as a 4 for referencing content related to opportunities. The least common content category was value (2), which included Facebook post content that mentioned price, scholarships or other monetary reference related to tuition. Of the 130 posts analyzed, only 4, or 3%, were coded as a 2 for referencing content related to the school's monetary value.

### **All posts**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage of mix</b>
3 – Academics	52	40%
4 – Opportunities	37	28.46%
5 – Affinity	24	18.46%
1 – Location	13	10%
2 – Value	4	3.08%

The Carlson School's Facebook content categorized in the researcher's content analysis is outlined below. Overwhelmingly, the Carlson School posted most frequently regarding the academics category (code 3), with 70% of their posts mentioning staff or faculty, specific MBA program offerings or other USPs unique to the School. Conversely, the Carlson School did not

post at all about content that referenced value (code 2) or opportunities (code 4), and only once about affinity (code 5).

### **Carlson School posts**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage of mix</b>
3 – Academics	7	70%
1 – Location	2	20%
5 – Affinity	1	10%
2 – Value	0	0%
4 – Opportunities	0	0%

The most common post descriptions found in the researcher's content analysis highlighted the school's faculty and staff, which also happened to appear within the most common code (academics, code 3). These posts cited content outside of social media and all linked to the articles referenced in the posts, indicating that social and digital channels were working hand-in-hand to provide a richer channel experience. This supports the researcher's hypothesis that digital and social channels utilized in isolation may not be as effective. The schools that most frequently posted content that featured the school's faculty and staff were the Carlson School, McDonough School of Business and Tuck School of Business with 40% of their posts respectively.

The second most common post descriptions found in the researcher's content analysis highlighted alumni in some way, which all appeared within the second most common code (opportunities, 4). The schools that most frequently posted content that featured alumni were Kellogg School of Management, and Booth School of Business with 40% of their posts respectively.

The researcher did not include engagement metrics, including likes, comments, shares and engagement rate with the Facebook posts for multiple reasons. The schools analyzed in the researcher's content analysis had drastically different Facebook page likes (audience sizes), ranging from 1,500 (Opus College of Business) to 27,000 (Booth School of Business).

Additionally, there was no way to know whether the schools had paid to promote any of their Facebook posts analyzed in the researcher's content analysis, and if so, the amount of money that was used to promote the posts. Both significantly different Facebook page sizes and an inability to know whether content was promoted using paid media were too large of variables to include engagement metrics in the content analysis. These metrics would not have been valuable.

## Discussion

The researcher's findings support the hypothesis that part-time and full-time MBA prospective students information search differently when choosing an MBA program. The differences are outlined below:

### Information searching techniques for prospective MBA students at the Carlson School

Prospective part-time MBA students      Prospective full-time MBA students

Referral networks	Google searches for programs
In-person information sessions	Google searches for rankings
Carlson School website	Larger competitive set
Smaller competitive set	



As summarized above, prospective part-time MBA students are largely information searching and influenced by referral networks, while prospective full-time MBA students are Google searching and interested in a much larger competitive set of schools.

These findings support the hypothesis that the key differentiators for MBA programming vary for these two audiences. As summarized below, the part-time MBA program consistently differentiates from the competition on the basis of its international component and flexible scheduling, while the full-time MBA program differentiates based on location, the Enterprise program, and small class size, among others. Clearly, that marketing and advertising efforts need to be reflective of this finding.

### **Key differentiators for MBA programming at the Carlson School**

Part-time MBA program    Full-time MBA program

International component	Location
Flexible scheduling	Enterprise program
Location	Small class size
Professional network	Rankings/Job placement
	Connections with faculty and staff

### **Recommendations**

The implications of the researcher's findings are two-fold. First, part-time and full-time MBA marketing and communications efforts are, and will continue to be, difficult to bundle together. In other words, it will be difficult to achieve success with marketing and communications efforts blanketed to these two audiences, and this includes digital and social media channels. And second, because the part-time and full-time MBA audience's key differentiators and pain points

are vastly different, in addition to the manner in which they're information searching for MBA programming, the researcher recommends marketing to these two audiences separately.

Additionally, and as noted in the Results, there are key offerings in the part-time MBA and full-time MBA programs that are stand-out offerings for each program. These offerings—the Enterprise Program in the full-time MBA program, and the international experience required in the part-time MBA program, for example—are key differentiators and can help sell the programs individually to their target markets. This will contribute to both the part-time and full-time MBA program's recruitment success of differentiating from the competition on these stand-out offerings instead of trying to be everything to everyone. The researcher recommends creating marketing and communications collateral for each of the target audiences, part-time and full-time MBA prospects, based on these stand-out offerings. Marketing and communications efforts will play a large role in recruitment success when tailored appropriately as discussed above.

In conclusion, the researcher's findings support the hypothesis that when used in isolation, social media and digital channels may not be rich enough channels for the recipient (prospective MBA student) to be effective. This hypothesis is supported by informational interview and focus group findings as well as from the Facebook post content analyzed in the researcher's content analysis. Because of this, the researcher suggests that recruitment efforts on digital and social media channels would be more effective when executed in conjunction with larger campaigns across lean and rich channels (Suma and Wymer, 2010). It is the contention of these analyses that efforts should be consistent with the brand voice, and messaging should be consistently marketed across channels. Recruitment efforts executed in isolation on digital or social media may not be rich enough or consistent enough for the recipient to be effective. The researcher recommended that digital and social recruitment efforts be integrated into the rest of the Carlson School's brand

marketing strategy. The researcher recommends that funds be committed to both digital and social recruitment efforts to drive scale as well as take advantage of specific targeting opportunities available. Utilizing specific targeting opportunities will also help reach a much more interested audience that is inclined to apply for the Carlson School's MBA programming if used effectively. By targeting specific audiences whom already meet the demographic and information searching criteria for MBA programming, the Theory of Planned Behavior and the researcher's findings would suggest that this increases the likelihood of influencing the outcome in the first place. Without a paid media budget committed to both social and digital recruitment, efforts will not drive adequate scale to prove successful. Marketing and communications efforts tailored specifically for each of the two established target audiences that utilize a breadth of communications channels, including but not limited to, social and digital media, position both the part-time and full-time MBA programs at the Carlson School for success.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study's limitations include researcher bias and convenience sampling. This researcher interviewed a convenience sample in informational interviews. All informational interviews were conducted with current Carlson School MBA staff. Focus group participants were also of a convenience sample. All focus group participants were at least somewhat involved with the School's extracurricular activities and were heavily recruited for their respective programming as top candidates. Additionally, the content analysis only analyzed the most recent 10 posts on each of the 10 school's Facebook pages. The researcher is also a Carlson School employee working in a marketing and communications role that is closely involved with marketing strategy for MBA recruitment efforts.

This researcher recommends that future research address the Carlson School's initiatives to reach key markets through marketing and communications for recruitment. These markets currently include military students, multicultural students, students with a health care background, and female students. Future research should address how to reach these key markets on digital and social media channels.

The researcher also recommends that future research address how digital and social media channels can play a role in alumni relations at the Carlson School. Are social and digital channels rich enough channels to effectively market and communicate with alumni to retain engagement and foster long-term relationships with the school? And how could these efforts impact an increase in affinity with the Carlson School, which undoubtedly has positive long-term and far-reaching implications.

Further research regarding the substantially lower affinity levels with the Carlson School that part-time MBA students consistently exhibited in both informational interviews and focus groups would also be valuable. Better understanding why the part-time MBA program has fewer key differentiators than the full-time MBA program at the Carlson School may also be relevant to the affinity discussion.

Lastly, the researcher recommends conducting a full-time MBA student experience report similar to the part-time MBA mapping found in Appendix C in order to avoid speculation about the full-time MBA audience and their potential archetypes and sought after experiences. This will help to better market to the full-time audience.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview transcriptions**

#### **SOURCE 1**

**Interview with Hans Peterson, associate director of student affairs**

**March 19, 2014**

#### **What role do you have in the Part-Time MBA program?**

My role with the students on both full-time and part-time is essentially support for anything they do in the program that's non-academic. So student organizations, which in the full-time program tends to be 20-ish, part-time tends to be 2-4. Also any larger milestone things they do, like orientation. Larger events like the charity auction, golf events, things like that. Also, commencement and any speaker events. I also handle behavior issues and policy questions.

#### **How do part-time students differ from their full-time MBA counterparts?**

The part-time population is interesting and challenging because it's huge and diverse. That's the biggest challenge with it.

If you contrast it with the full-time population, the full-time program is growing and the part-time program is shrinking. Not by design, that reflects a national trend. I'm working on a larger program looking at a part-time experience and marketing sizing project. Nobody knows, but I can speculate why part-time is shrinking. Decreased interest in companies supporting MBAs, more people that have challenges straight out of undergrad and getting jobs they don't want to leave. For full-time students, they are very smart students who did something a little atypical and are using the MBA to focus themselves more into the traditional business track. Or they work for a small company and want to go bigger. There's a bigger return on investment with full-time programs now than with part-time. You can clearly see people entering the program making this amount, then they finish the program and make more. The part-time people are a little fuzzier.

Part-time people enter the program making a little bit more money. They're just very different. A big chunk of them work at 10 giant fortune 500 companies that regularly send between 10-70 students in a given year, Target being the high end. The U of M is one of the top 10 employers sending students here, people getting an MBA to supplement their work here or people who ultimately plan to leave once they get their MBA. So there's a real mix there.

#### **About how many students make up each part-time MBA graduating class?**

Full-time is about 110 students per class

We have about 1200 part-time students right now (not an exact figure)

#### **Why is affinity to the School important for the Part-Time MBA program?**

Students perform better in programs and have better outcomes if they feel that it is a part of their identity in some ways, other than just something they're just tacking onto what they're doing. And it's really hard to do that. If they don't have that, this program is tough. These people are super busy, a big chunk have families. We've started doing exit interviews and we get feedback that it's very hard on their marriages and families. Part of the goal at the front end, we really try

to get spouses and significant others involved too. For a lot of students, it's expensive: fewer are getting support from employers than they used to. For some, it's really clear what the benefit will be at the end, others not as much. And there's varying levels of engagement among the students. It's a heavy group oriented program, and you get some people that this is really something they want to do, and want to learn it. They might have goals that they really want to learn. We have others that are just checking off a box, and it's a big means to an end, "if I get this, I know exactly what my title will change to and I'll get paid more." It's really hard when you have an unknown segment of the population that view this as a purely financial decision.

You really do have these four groups. You have the people that view it as a life-affirming experience, and then you have a group that says my company is paying for half of it and I have to check a box. And when you put those people together in a group, it's challenging. You can't force people to do it, but as much as you can connect those people that do want that immersive experience. For the people that are trying to check off the box, fine, you can't force them to do anything, so how can we make the program as flexible as possible. For the students that are more traditional that are looking for an immersive, networking, community building, career changing experience, how do we make sure to connect those students to each other? It's hard for them to feel connected to the program, it's hard for them to figure out which students have the same goals they do. So you try to build them together by creating optional stuff, like events, student governments, and other opportunities to make them feel apart of something more than this "check-box" population. That's of the most importance to me is to be sure those students are getting the network experience and the connections and opportunities and sense of affiliation that they're looking for. We have to make sure they have a mechanism to meet each other. We really don't want those students to come to the part-time program, and they learn what the full-time students are getting then feel like second-class citizens. Are we just checkbooks to fund the full-time program?

### **What effect do alumni have on the program rankings?**

Rankings in particular are prominent in the mind of full-time students. They care more. They looked at a wider number of schools before coming here. They are a little bit more invested in the perceived quality of their degree as they're applying for jobs because they're going to be doing it immediately after they finish. So it's a little less of a checkbox requirement. It depends on which rankings you look at but with U.S. News it doesn't matter so much, aside from employment rates, doesn't matter what they do after, it's more of a ranking of what they look like when they enter, what's the quality of the students you're able to get in the door?

Businessweek is very heavily related to perception and largely weighted on how the students in the program rank you. So that one will be heavily dependent on the quality of what the students themselves survey when they exit the program and they do that on a bi-annual basis. That has a very big impact on both what we hear from alumni who see those rankings every year and want their degree to be highly valued. The current students are very invested in that. Last year, the Businessweek rankings dropped and they were very interested in what they could do to change it, because it was important to them. It also, of course, matters to prospective students.

Part-Time we're ranked higher because there's fewer people competing and our metropolitan setting gives us a huge advantage. Carlson is a bit different, we're the opposite for what you'll see for an MBA program. The full-time program is a flagship and is mostly what they care about.

They'll have big full-time programs and tiny part-time programs. Relatively speaking, Carlson has a tiny part-time program. Part of the marketing we do for full-time is that we're way smaller, and it allows us to do the Enterprises. Our part-time ranking is very high, I think it was 9 last year. Those students care a little less, those students are weighing cost/benefit analysis because we are the expensive option. The question they will constantly ask is, "I'm paying more than St. Thomas, is it worth it?" Once they enroll, they continue to weigh whether they're getting what they paid for, their satisfaction will be largely based on whether they made the right decision to pay more to come here.

**From what you've observed, what have been some barriers to Part-Time MBA students becoming connected to the school?**

Part-time student communication is a struggle. Challenges with communicating to those populations are that we are really limited. They are here almost exclusively in the evenings. Also, there's no cohort, they do it at their own pace, they don't do it at a consistent pace, they take the classes in different order, and so there's no built-in way to communicate with them. We have our office open until 7 p.m., but there's usually only one academic advisor and one admissions person plus a front desk person on staff those nights. So they're not doing large amounts of programming on those nights. We occasionally do, but then we have to do it five nights to reach everybody. The full-time students do the program on a sort of cohort system, so we know when they're in the building. For part-time students, we do Welcome Week the first week of classes when we offer dinner and a speaker, but you have to do it five nights, so it's expensive, it's intensive, it requires a lot of effort, it means you hit some of them five times, and you miss some because people take terms off. We have a part-time newsletter that's our primary mechanism of communication that we send out every Monday, letting them know anything they need to know about advising, registration, events and speakers on campus, seminars or conferences, but that is super passive. It's emailed to 1200 people, so it's not particularly focused in terms of messaging. The one factor we can target is that the recipient is a part-time MBA student here, but we can't divide the list any more than that. And it's email to a population of people who may or may not check that email (CAN GET NUMBERS). We track opens. We don't know how much of that information is actually getting through. That's the primary mechanism we have and it's really limited.

We've had the same student affairs team in place for a couple of years now, we're getting more savvy as students enter the program. We can't do much with the larger student body (takes students an average of 3.5 years to complete the program) because they've been here forever, some are here 2.5 years and others are here for 7. Now with incoming students, we've switched to Moodle. We've now had a fall and spring entering class that we've brought into Moodle immediately, and it's better because it's easier to track more specifically what they're accessing. So we get a little better metrics about what those students are accessing. It allows us to take a different approach to orientation, which for part-time students is a big deal because we don't have them all in one place together very often. When I started here, orientation was one intensive day that we spent talking at them. They usually enter with 100 other students who will take different classes than them, so it's really hard to keep those connections. We moved it to a weekend, do dinner on a Friday and it's networking focused, then the Saturday we do a lot of team building stuff, and a handful of policy, then move a lot of the training pieces onto Moodle so they have access in advance. Our sense is that they're using Moodle, but we still have these 4-



5 years' worth of students that we decided not to bring into Moodle because we didn't want to retroactively implement something.

**What resources and information do Part-Time MBA students seek most often?**

The academic advising: the part-time students get far more attention from academic advising than full-time. The full-time students monopolize career services and extracurricular opportunities. But the part-time people are all doing the program differently, and are all concerned about getting courses waived and making the program work for them. They use the advising more heavily.

They'll contact us if they want speakers, involvement opportunities, support for conferences, or daily life stuff. The student organizations deal with issues like when they want something changed, like access to food on campus.

A handful use the career services, but a lot don't use it. More should, probably. It's not that the students wouldn't benefit from it, I just don't think they understand how it's relevant to them.

**Are there any programs or tactics the school has implemented recently to forge a stronger connection with these students? How did it work out?**

So for example, one other thing we've tried is they do tend their first semester to take MBA 6300, so one thing we've tried is getting a faculty member to agree to put in a slide about upcoming events and things like that. We didn't maintain it just because it was a pain, because some students come in last minute. You also only reach new students, which isn't all bad because those are usually the ones we have the best chance of connecting with. There's not really any way to measure how it worked, so we didn't continue it, because it wasn't a good cost benefit. Moodle has been the most successful change we've had.

We're really on the lookout for some new ways to communicate with students. Because right now we're just doing a weekly email, and we know that it's imperfect. Another challenge is how many emails students get as a default. They get so many emails that they do not care about, because they're lumped in with graduate students who are writing their dissertations and doing research. They are not the target audience, they do not care. They don't want to go to academic conferences. They're professional students, they're not here for an academic career.

**What are some opportunities Part-Time students have for connecting with the school?**

The orientation restructuring is the biggest one. We used to have them all in a room one time and we used 90 percent of that time to talk at them and tell them how to do stuff. We have tried to move that onto Moodle so they can do it online so they don't have to sit for eight hours and listen. We've turned that opportunity into a combination of speed networking stuff and team activities. We want every students to leave that orientation having five to ten students that for the rest of the program they know and recognize. And it seems juvenile, but they do leave knowing those students. We've tried to be a little more versatile and flexible and low commitment. We have to be realistic, we're not going to get students that want to join a club that meets once a week on top of everything else they're doing. We try to build things that are interesting to them and family friendly: we do the MBA picnic so they can bring their families and aren't choosing between doing something social for a program or spending time with their families. Casual Fridays (do 4-5 events per year) have really taken off too, where we get local entrepreneurs to

come in on a Friday, give them free food, let them bring their spouses, and they hear Kieran from Kieran's Irish Pub talk about launching new products, etc. We're trying to stop using the full-time model. We're looking for something that will fit into their life and give them a chance to connect to other students.

**I've heard the international experience is particularly special to Part-Time students? Is that true? If so, why is it valuable for them?**

Some of the part-time students do international opportunities to do learning abroad stuff. More heavily engaged students in particular are using the Carlson Global Institute for global enrichment programs.

**How are prospective Part-Time MBA students currently information searching on programming?**

For a lot of students, it's about company word of mouth. This is qualitative, but from the past few orientations, I've mingled with people and I ask everybody if they know people at their company that are doing the program. And most of them say yes. They talk to people in their company that are doing the program before signing up. That is almost the most common that their company already has a program established and they have coworkers or supervisors who do the same thing.

A lot of it is reputation. Part of the project I'm working on is to think about expanding the types of people we want to bring in. Because there are a lot of people to whom an MBA might be a good choice who don't think of it that way. How do we get more non-traditional people?

Roughly 80-85 percent of the people in the Twin Cities area that take the GMAT send their scores to Carlson. That doesn't mean it's their top choice or that they end up coming here, just that they send their scores here. So the majority of the people who consider a business school, consider Carlson. That's pretty early in the process, so you have to assume a lot of that is just word of mouth knowledge. We're the default in the Twin Cities area, we're on people's radar. Maybe as they proceed through that process they look at online, or Hamline, or fly to Chicago to do those programs. We have to be aware that in a competitive marketplace, some go outside the region.

We don't do a lot of the billboard things for advertising. Is that good or bad? That's a hard decision to make. There are connotations that come with having your higher ed institution on a billboard. Do you get too close to University of Phoenix when you do that. Or is it different with a business degree? You're not going to find the top undergrad institutions putting up billboards. But in MBA is it OK to do it? I don't know. They're trying some new stuff. I think for a long time this program has rested in its laurels. Because we're the default, we're on people's radar. People that do the part-time program aren't moving here to do the program, they already live here. We're already on their minds. But is that changing a little bit. Those part-time numbers are going down, what does that mean? Preliminary numbers suggest we're maintaining market share and the market is shrinking. But if that's the case, can we grow the market?

**What are the top selling points for the Part-Time MBA program for prospective students?**

With an MBA program, we're less hesitant to sell the name brand than you would be in undergrad. I came from undergraduate admissions where you're not selling the placement, you're selling the experience, even if you have a name brand to stand on. With part-time MBA,

that's a little less true. Most of these people have a pretty heavy weight to the transactional value of it. What's the outcome? Not just, what am I going to learn, but what's the outcome? In the long-term, if you're applying for a job in ten years and the person you're competing against has a similar resume, don't you want to have gone to a top program? Or where is the person making the hiring decision more likely to have gone to school? You're selling them the career services office. Some of these students are open to going someplace else. You're also selling them on the quality of the other students: this is a group work program, there are networking opportunities. How much are you going to learn from your classmates? Who are you going to network with? I sell people to be more engaged. We're going to have more engaged alumni, the students are going to be more successful academically, they're going to be happier, all these benefits result from students engaging with the program and with each other. I tell them, this is the only time in your career you're going to get this level of networking with every top company. By the time you graduate this program, you should have 4-5 connections at the Fortune 500 companies in the area. This is the only time you get that. Part of what you're selling them is the quality of people that come into the program and where they come from and what their knowledge is. Faculty, we push the faculty. We make the argument that there's a different level of knowledge and exposure you get from being inside a Big Ten research university.

## **SOURCE 2**

**Interview with Patrick McCarthy, director of student affairs  
March 25, 2014**

### **What role do you have in the Part-Time MBA program?**

Full-time and part-time programs, I own a number of services we provide to current students once they've been admitted. I cover the communications and registration processes, the support mechanisms that are in place for students. The could include orientation, academic advising, managing their visa statuses, if they have tuition or billing matters they can operate through us to get those addressed. We have two sides of the house, one very academic, and one very community based. Myself, Hans, and Maggie are responsible for making sure our clubs and organizations are resourced properly, that we are funding those programs, and that we are operating under the guidelines and policies of the University. We spend tremendous amounts of time face to face with students as they either put together their academic plan to reach graduation, which we also manage, plus all the opportunities where they get to lead and represent Carlson in some shape or form. So if they're the president of the consulting club and reaching out to Deloitte, we can connect them. We also tend to sit in a lot of student managed meetings as they attempt to put together larger scale events, like the charity auction. We help navigate all the bureaucratic channels too. There's no real central historian here at Carlson: you have a lot of institutional memory built into the staff and that does prove valuable to the students over time. So the legacy that exists for our full-time program, after two years they're gone, anything that they did really well might not survive the transition to the next student group, so we help facilitate that.

### **Why is affinity to the school important for the Part-Time MBA program?**

I think in the large mix of MBA programs within the U.S., every program wants to have affinity and it seems as though the value is realized in a couple of different ways. One, every program wants to be different, even though they aren't very different. We all offer similar resources and

programs. When I go to conferences with my peers, we're all talking about relatively the same thing. So affinity helps distinguish us, it gives us this distinctiveness between programs. You realize affinity when you discover the special nature of an MBA program. For our part-time MBA students, I think that's realized in a few ways. We are the top program. Part-time students that submit surveys to us when we request them indicate that we are the best program in the state, that seems to carry some brand value in a sense. We interpret that as when part-time students tell their employer they're going to Carlson, they're being recognized as high-achieving people. I don't think there's much question about our admissions standards and who we're putting through the program. So affinity is built around the fact that they feel that they have been categorized in a certain way: they're high-achieving, they're going to be successful, and the program will lend success in their career.

Affinity also means that they're interacting with their peers, so it's important that they're being recognized, not just on an individual level, but as a large group of very capable people. So they enjoy interacting with each other to learn how their peers are doing things differently. So that might yield good opportunities for discussion and growth.

But they want to be sure that as they're moving through the program, they want to be sure we're admitting the best possible students. Ten years from now, when they're a Carlson alum, they want to know that we're protecting the value of their degree. Affinity is born out of that basic promise that we will continue admitting top quality students forever. They feel good about that. There's also Goldy. We're all big Goldy fans. We're part of the larger University, and it's not hard to fall in love with this University. In a lot of ways, in fields like agriculture, science, and medicine, there's this great feel-good sentiment about being a part of that much larger system that is contributing not just to the individual development of our students but to the state and to its wellness, health, legal systems, business culture. When students see a sick kid and hear about Amplatz, they feel this great affinity to the work that's being done here. At every orientation we tell students that same thing: doctors safeguard the health of society, lawyers play their role in fairness within society, but the MBA student is playing an important role in managing the resources of society, and together they are all doing something very special.

### **What effect do alumni have on the program rankings?**

For part-time rankings, those figures are less significant it seems. Especially for us. If you were to take a straw pool of people from the Mall of America and they were all Minnesotans, the majority would probably say that Carlson has the number one program. That's just a general sentiment. The rankings themselves are very full-time focused. Some rankings will do somewhat of a side ranking for part-time programs. It doesn't have the same weight. But they've ranked us within the top 20, many times in the top 15, and we've been in the top 10 at least once or twice. Where it becomes important is with alumni. Some data suggests that with rising tuition costs, part-time students don't want to see the rankings slip. If they're paying more, they don't want to see anything that suggests the program is degrading. Part-time students put a little bit of stock into it, I think. But not to the same extent of full-time students.

### **From what you've observed, what have been some barriers to Part-Time MBA students becoming connected to the school?**

I worked at the Kellogg School in the part-time program and I had 14 clubs plus a student government, but what I have in the full-time program is relatively the same. But in the part-time program, I have a student government and 1.5 clubs, depending on how you look at it. Part-time student government has created a group called the professional student network. Professional Student Network to me suggests to me that these students should be getting together and networking, but what they do is some of that through speed networking events and a holiday party. They get students together for events that are somewhat social in nature, but what we haven't realized yet is some of the professional clubs that should exist. That would probably more quickly attract students to attend for networking and development. Maybe bring in speakers that could yield some results for them. So that's where my frustration is, having seen it done at Kellogg, it's been very difficult.

We have a very hard time communicating with our part-time students in my opinion. Communication seems to be stifled by the large volume of emails they receive from us and the University. We only know of a few things they're getting: How much communication are they receiving now? Anecdotally, they say they get a ton of email and we get lost in the mix. So this communication vehicle, the newsletter, gets lost. Our open rates are depressing. So the newsletter is not yielding a lot of information that's relevant to this audience. So the barrier there is we have a hard time getting penetration. In fact, I think if we could have a VP of communications that is an expert and can help us find something that works, that could help us get the penetration we need to. Short of putting a ferris wheel up in the atrium, there's no way I can conceive to better get a message out there.

Every student knows how to look for course information on the U's website, because all students have to do that. But they don't have to open the newsletter to do that.

I think there's a large number of students to come here, get the degree, check the box, and go. They don't want to be the leader of the marketing club, which is fine. Because there's about 1200 of these students. But if I have even ten percent invested, we'd be making big strides in the affinity space.

Could we build mailboxes somewhere in the school that we can put things in that they have to pick up because that's where faculty return papers? If you have to force people to go to something and pick it up, would that work? If you go to the intranet, it's not personalized in any real way. Without the personalization, I don't even feel a great affinity going to Inside Carlson or the intranet. So the barriers are there. There's one generic method of getting information and it's not very attractive.

I think students get a lot of information talking to each other and stopping into the office. But we don't see the volume we would expect from having as many students as we do.

**Are there any qualities or characteristics that differentiate these students from other graduate or undergraduate students at the Carlson School?**

Full-time and part-time students are relatively the same in age and experience. So profile, they look really similar. Within a smaller full-time program, you get a higher GMAT average, but if I shrank down the part-time program to the top 100 students, it would be similar scores to full-time. So they're both very intelligent populations. Where we see the differences is their

willingness to commit over a particular timeframe. For many it's a lifestyle choice: Can I forgo a salary for a few years and emerge successfully and reestablish my career? For some students, that's a scary proposition, but others are willing to take that risk.

This deep diver notion: the perception is that there are relatively no full-time MBA students that are just coming here to check a box, especially this program. We make them work way harder than other programs. Other programs require far fewer credits of core courses. Students know they are going to be diving very deep into this program to get their heads around the academics, and take on a leadership position in the community. Generally, the majority of students are going to be invested in guiding the program and enriching the experience for one another.

But part-time, you have a group that are the deep divers and are similar to the full-timers. They want to contribute and add value and create community, but then you have a large population of these ticket punchers that just want to get their degree and get out. They might have their reasons, and have massive commitments outside of this program and they fit us into their life as they want to. For both programs, we like to be a part of the students lives, but not their entire lives. But for full-time, we play a larger part.

**What information or resources do these students take advantage of most often?**

Students don't get to see a lot of good information on the faculty before they register. It's a main complaint of the part-time students. They have created their own evaluations of teachers within their companies. We could better service our students by being more transparent with teaching evaluations to better inform students and help them make good decisions about their courses. If I had a magic wand and I could waive it at two things I would get those ten student clubs up and running. I respect this student population hugely but I know they aren't in a great position to take that on: they're working full time and the idea of coming in and setting up organizations is daunting. So I feel like we should do it, but I don't want to take ownership away from them either. These clubs should at least be established with a clear mission for the students and what they're going to deliver in the first year, then put the call out to all the students.

But second, how do we send information out in a way that ACTUALLY REACHES students? I can send out a beautiful email that communicates information quickly, but it gets lost in the flood. So do I put up signage all over the atrium? One of the most successful events we have is Welcome Week, because we put out five days' worth of food. Everyone comes and they eat, and we have them all right there. But I'm really feeling like a caveman, trying to deal with this issue. We've gone to classrooms to present there because it's a captured audience, but I don't have twenty people that can go do that every night for four nights and one Saturday. That's why personalized something and mobile something else could be great.

There are people out there that have this terrific potential. You see it in their eyes. They're alive, and they want to develop and grow. You have this intoxicating kind of experience, and messaging to them is so very important. But we need to deliver on that.

**Have you implemented any programs or tactics recently to better connect with these students? What were the results? Anything that fell completely flat?**

We have a new part-time MBA orientation program that has been running for a year and half now. Part-time orientation used to be very transactional, a half day event that gave basic information. Now we have a two day program and in the first night, we invite their significant others and spouses to the dinner. That's yielded very good vibes. By the way, it's hard to dashboard things in student affairs. Admissions has more metrics to measure success. But we get a happiness indicator, that we do once a year and that's about it. Anecdotally, we've heard that they're very happy their families are included right away. We realize the importance of that in our part-time program: We're going to be stealing a night or two away from their families and we need to acknowledge that.

In the second day, we do some transactional stuff, but we also incorporate speed networking and volunteering. So we've chosen a number of kid-related charities and that generates a lot of good affinity and good vibe.

We have Moodle and the intranet. Moodle is a good place for the part-time community to communicate with one another and the administration. Moodle has been successful in controlling content that allows us to customize the format according to their student accounts. The information they see is different depending on their student status. It is nowhere near where personalization should be, but it does allow me to see some things that are relevant.

### **How are prospective Part-Time MBA students currently information searching on programming?**

Before becoming director of student affairs here at Carlson, I was associate director of admissions so I got a bit of insight about how we were attracting students at that time. In Minnesota, there is a very tight-knit group of people. They form their networks to be strong, and they rely upon them. As an out-of-stater, it's been harder to break into those networks. What we've heard from full-time students, is that when they come from out of state, they have a hard time breaking into that network. Basically, people are informed through their networks if they're from here. They talk. They generally will know someone who went to Carlson or the U, and speak with them. So I imagine candidates who are local are utilizing their networks. "Did my manager go to Carlson? Do I know someone that went to Carlson?"

More actively, they're certainly hitting the website for information. They come for information sessions, which are basically presentations. We have some workshops that we hope to attract prospective students to, especially for part-time MBA, about how to put your application together. We realize there is some anxiety about putting the best application together before submitting it to Carlson. We do not want students to self-select out of the process before being admitted to the program. So we try to help them put together the best application.

The web plays an important role, for both full-time and part-time, especially full-time if they're not from Minnesota. The web presents a lot of components about the program.

There are different aspects of the full-time program that are considered the crown jewels: the Enterprises are our four living laboratories where we put students through real, transformative programming. We can take anyone in that space and turn them into something else. They should know a lot about that before coming in to interview: they should check it out online and reach out to people that are in that enterprise. They utilize the ambassador program, and connect with students. There's no script for those ambassadors to ensure we're delivering the same

information. It could be different from person to person. If I'm a prospective student in the full-time student interested in consulting, I can meet a brand enterprise student.

We used a podcast back when that medium was newer. We did a day in the life of an MBA student for full-time. In terms of what we were being charged, it was being utilized pretty well. It was 20-30 minutes and followed a student around. It was fun, and it was being utilized pretty well considering what we were being charged.

Admissions has a blog, and students contribute to that. It's real, it's not the glitzy recruiting content: it puts everything in a real life. Students share the real experience. In terms of information sharing, we have electronic components like Twitter and the website, but also information sessions and their own networks. The recruiter relationship with the candidate is also important.

There are some things that we could do better. Our students are tremendously successful in this program, but we don't get the word out about that. Two years ago, we were in eight national case competitions. Last year, we were in 14 and we had a couple of first place wins. This year, we were in 19 case competitions, had a number of first place wins, and brought home more than \$30,000 in winnings and the students took home substantial winnings. Schools have taken note of that. We're now doing videos on their case competitions and as a top place team, we talk about how to prepare for the competitions.

We could share the experience of the students better. The charity auction would be noteworthy. The graduate volunteer consultants and the way our students give back through volunteer efforts is very noteworthy. We can get that out to someone, who I don't know. Do I want to be in the newspaper with this type of stuff? Not really. I think it might be a fun little blurb on a sidebar for our citizens to take note of. But I think there's other organizations and companies that would benefit from knowing that we take students and do great things with them. We should focus on getting more of our student success out in the open.

**What are the top selling points for the Part-Time MBA program for prospective students?**  
"I'm ambassing the hell out of these prosopies."

Prospective students for part-time see our credibility and brand, and know that it's portable. If they are considering their options, they can choose the U, pay a higher price for that, and ensure they can move to Georgia or any number of places, and the U of M name is known. We rely on a dual-brand relationship that is U of M nationally, and Carlson regionally. Students can get courses waived, and that seems to be an attractive feature.

Students have access to the career center and can utilize some coaching to help leverage the value of the degree in regards to their careers, and I think we have the best career coaches in the state. That's an important value add to the MBA experience.

I think students come here because they know the best part-time applicants are coming here. They want to be in a group of peers in a classroom where they can learn from each other. Flexibility and online course offerings are growing in importance. They can take half-semester courses to move forward in their degree. We're planning to offer more flexible options. So those



are growing in popularity. Every online section and compressed course we offer are full, all part-time students because they want to get through more quickly.

The international requirement that's a part of the part-time program is actually viewed as a big benefit. They actually get to go abroad to study another country's market and business practices, and this business community supports that. They also get to know their classmates really well during that time, and the students cite that as the highlight of their academic career, as one of the most valuable parts of their experience. So that's the part-time experience.

In full-time, what distinguishes us are the Enterprises. Other programs call us all the time to ask how they're sustained and managed. It turns out that we have terrific investment in those, that happened years ago, that is paying out now. We have a business community that wants to work with us, and continue to work with us year after year. The students take it seriously, and continue to put out good work, as do the directors.

The global experience requirement is similar as an attractive feature. We ensure students leave this program with an international mindset. When we bring students in, we talk a great deal about Enterprises and the global requirement, and what they get out of it.

We're a smaller program, and that intimacy allows for greater success. We have five coaches in the career center for 100 students, whereas other students have seven for 800. You're going to get more hands-on attention here. In the case of when a student applies for a job and gets multiple offers, they let their friend know to go talk to them. Our students help one another in that regard, there's not a great deal of competition in that space, they feel invested in each other.

### **SOURCE 3**

**Interview with Tedi Mason, assistant director of admissions and recruiting  
April 9, 2014**

#### **What role do you have in the MBA program?**

I'm the first line of defense. I get all the cold calls talking about MBAs. We split up all our inquiries, so I have a section of people that are in the pipeline. I'll also do interviews and the actual application review, from when they apply to when they get in.

#### **Why is affinity to the school important for the Part-Time MBA program?**

I think affinity is really helpful in people seeing the value of their MBA. They may not want to spend a lot of time fostering those relationships while they're here, but once they graduate, they call me and ask to put them in touch with someone. But if they feel more connected and can bridge those gaps themselves, that's helpful. It would also help in promoting the program to more people because if you have that brand loyalty, you'll think "why would I even consider going anywhere besides Carlson." I can see corporate clubs really doing a lot with that, as well as our alumni department, just getting people excited. And even if it's a few undergrads that we're capturing as well, but just getting the U of M love going.

#### **What effect do alumni have on the program rankings?**

It is less important to part-time students, I also think they are less informed. They're going to look, but they might not know the difference among all the rankings. Then you also have other people saying they're in the top 25 percent of MBA programs, which isn't an accurate reflection of where they stand on the totem pole. We need to toot our own horn a little bit better because we are in the top 10 percent and number 19. We talked about doing something cheeky to get that message across, but it didn't pan out. I also think the specialty rankings, they tend to put a lot more stock in that at the part-time level, but I don't think that's as valuable and I don't think they're going to get much out of it. I think at the end of the day, part-time is more about money and time.

**From what you've observed, what have been some barriers to Part-Time MBA students becoming connected to the school?**

Time. I think we also just don't have as many resources for them, not that we don't give them resources. But we don't have that social aspect that we do in the full-time program. There are certainly opportunities for it, but then again, only so many of them want it. They're all here at different times and you never know who you're going to get.

The move to online is going to make things even harder in the affinity space. It's going to be great to have that flexibility, but it will also distance us further from them.

I also experience some frustration when we put information out there, and I still get calls asking questions. Ten people may not like all the information they get, but two may. And we build the program one person at a time. It's kind of a finite time period to when they apply, usually 2-6 years after they graduate. Part-timers may make an inquiry two years out of undergraduate and not apply until eight years later, and they have been in the pipeline for a long time, and so it's hard to tell.

**Are there any qualities or characteristics that differentiate these students from other graduate or undergraduate students at the Carlson School?**

There are just so many part-timers. We don't see them or interview them. And it's really up to them how much they want to be involved. A lot want to really get involved and meet their classmates, others want to show up, do their classes, and go home. And I don't blame them.

**How are prospective MBA students currently information searching on programming?**

We wish we knew more, right now it's still very ambiguous. A lot of people reach out to us on our website, both full-time and part-time. We also buy lists of people who have taken the GMAT. And then we'll blast out emails to them. That seems to be moderately effective, probably more so with the part-time folks. Because if they're in this market and in this age group, they're probably going to get an MBA from us or St. Thomas. That's been pretty helpful here. But as far as how they actually find us, we really don't know. People come to events we host, sometimes people get brought to our events. A lot of it is referrals, that their boss or someone they knew is getting their MBA.

I think full-time students are more rankings driven, they're going through those rankings lists. Part-time we see being a little more tuition based, but they are also concerned a bit with rankings. We wish we knew better.

**What are the top selling points for the Full-Time MBA program for prospective students?**

Hands down, Enterprise Programs are very unique in the MBA market, especially something as robust as we have. We've been doing this a really long time, so we definitely sell our Enterprise Programs to recruits. We definitely sell our size, it's both good and bad, we lose people because of our size. We're significantly smaller than other top competitors. We're by far the smallest top-tier MBA program. The market here is also important, we have a lot of corporate partners. Again, Enterprise is what we really push and what people really like.

Part-time, we go with our esteem in the area. We're always trying to find a way to differentiate from St. Thomas. That's really what we're looking for. We are much higher ranked, have better faculty, have more resources and alumni, but there's nothing that really stands out to point to that we're so much better. Like we don't have an Enterprise Program in the part-time program-- basically we don't have a top selling point. It's a bit more ambiguous.

**What are the pain-points for the PTMBA program? And are they potentially related to why prospective students choose other programming?**

Full-time is location, being in Minnesota is challenging. Not being a coastal city or being Chicago, being smaller. Again, that's also a selling point for us. It's one of those, well, what do you do--it sells our program for some candidates and is a deterrent for others. We lose a lot of people early in the pipeline to that. If they can get over that hump, it's not such a big deal anymore. Rankings has been a little tough recently. I think those are the really big things. Tuition is on par with competitors. We don't have a lot of scholarships available, compared to other places, and that's hard. Our lack of diversity can hurt us too when we're trying to get people. Then the fact that when people come to Minnesota, they stay here, so we don't have as big of a connection to the coasts from an alumni perspective. But we try to highlight, "yes, you can get out to Silicon Valley or New York, we have those connections." It is possible, but lots of people want to just stay in Minneapolis, St. Paul. We could showcase this better.

Part-Time is money, number of credits, and time it takes. That's really it. Once people start diving in, it becomes apparent that we are far and away the best program. But it also costs more and takes longer to complete compared to St. Thomas.

**In regards to PTMBA advertising, what has worked? What hasn't?**

I'm not as tied into what marketing communications has done for us. I know the billboards weren't well-received. For a while there was stuff in the airport and I don't think we saw anything from that either. As far as stuff that has worked, it seemed there was an ad in the Strib about one of our part-time events, and I believe we got some traction from that, but I don't know if we got any great numbers from that.

I got a good response from some social media efforts before I travelled using promoted posts. I don't feel like I know enough to give a comprehensive answer.

People really like Be, Belong, Become. I don't think we've used it to its full advantage, though. But I feel like we could do more with that because we're not seeing it everywhere. I would love to see more stories around that. Especially with our size: during our admitted students weekend,

what sold us what that the students knew everybody there. It's that community and really building that. I think that campaign really fosters that in that we mean what we say.

There's just so many of them with the part-timers. We just don't see them as much through the process. We don't interview them, we don't see them through the application process. It's really up to them how much they want to be involved. A good number of them want to meet their classmates and network, but a good number of them also want to come and get their work done because they're working full-time and are tired, and I don't blame them.

**Do you feel that Carlson's social media presence plays a role in PTMBA recruitment efforts? If so, how? If not, how could it play a role in the future?**

I feel like we're still kind of stabbing in the dark and I wish we had a better way of doing it. It gets people excited. We had lots of people tweeting this weekend for our Up Close event, which was fun. I don't necessarily want to see it as just community building, I would love to see it as outreach. I would love to use Facebook to get to the friends of the people who are currently in the MBA program. I don't know how to use it as a pipeline tool or make it be valuable. But we need to, in my opinion, to make it more valuable.

People love those stories on the website. Any time we can show alumni or current students and how the MBA program transformed their life, and get more part-time students that would be great to really show the different types of part-time students. There are the people who want to get their MBA to get a promotion, and then there's the people who want to get their MBA and change companies, and that's the impetus for coming back to school. And then, you have the part-timers who are looking to completely change industries--from economics to marketing, for example, and showing everyone that all of these things, we can help you do. We know you have a family and that it's hard. Showing people that it's attainable and that they're smart enough to do it. I think we get a lot of self selection now. We get a lot of people who feel they couldn't get into Carlson and they self select. If we could capture this audience, that would be really helpful.

**SOURCE 4**

**Interview with Linh Gilles, director of admissions and recruiting  
March 31, 2014**

**How are prospective part-time MBA students currently information searching on programming?**

The part-time market is very different here than the full-time market, so let's start with part-time. This is predominantly a local market and they are very attuned to peer referrals. Luckily for us, the Carlson School has a strong reputation in the Twin Cities market, so the peer-to-peer referrals give us a huge advantage. When someone is considering an MBA while continuing to work, they're asking their peers at work "did you enjoy your MBA experience?" or "what did you like about the curriculum?" or at the very least, "why did you choose the Carlson School?". This is where we have an advantage. There are a huge number of part-time MBA alums who are still working and advancing their careers in the Twin Cities. And because of this, our word-of-mouth referral network is super strong.

It's also worth noting that our application process is much more rigorous than other part-time MBA programs in the Twin Cities. So this referral network is very integral to our success. And with the part-time network, national rankings play a much smaller role than they do in the FT program. I know that our candidates are not typically information searching for this. They honestly don't really care all that much about rankings. Because they're going to be staying in the Twin Cities and working full-time while in the MBA program, they're more concerned about the quality of the program as defined by their peers and the time it takes to complete the program than the rankings. If they were primarily concerned with rankings, they would find the top program that they're capable of getting into, and move to that location to do their full-time program.

For the full-time candidates, we see similar information searching techniques to those considering the part-time program. Especially for local candidates. We're already in their consideration set if they live in the Twin Cities—if they're a top candidate, they know that we're the best MBA program in the Twin Cities. We have a leg-up on the competition in that regard. Where the full-time candidate population differs most greatly is in how much they care about rankings. These candidates are VERY rankings-driven, especially for international candidates. They also care about what their peer networks think about specific programs, especially if the peers are alums. And this all comes back to creating vibrant alumni networks in each of our key recruitment areas across the country and world. Not super relevant to this conversation, but this is a huge influencer overall.

The full-time candidate population is very interested in gathering as much information as possible across all of their networks. This includes attending ad fairs, getting on email list-servs, sifting through schools' websites, asking their current employers—and those at organizations that they would like to work for post-MBA program. We do think there is an opportunity for social media here—this could really help us tell a story about what it's like to be a student in our programs. I see this being especially valuable for people applying internationally and from other regions who can't easily make a campus visit to the school.

**What are the top selling points for the part-time MBA program for prospective students? And how does this differ from the full-time population?**

Our top seller for both is the experiential learning component. Both from an international perspective and the enterprises programming. Our alums say that they can apply what they're learning in the classroom to the real world. And for the part-timers, this could happen the very next day at work. These two aspects of our programming really set us apart from our competitors in both the part-time and full time markets.

We also have a unique community here in the Twin Cities that sets us apart. There aren't a lot of our competitors who can say that their campus is flush up against one of the most vibrant business communities in the country. That's a huge differentiator for us.

Our small class size for the full-time program is definitely a selling point for us. As well as the expertise of our faculty.

Where we struggle is trying to be everything to everyone. We have a lot of different tracks for specific programming that our MBA's may be interested; entrepreneurship, marketing, finance, etc., and to a potential candidate, this may look like we're trying too hard to be everything.

**What are the pain-points for the part-time MBA program? And what about the full-time program?**

For the part-time program, there's the perception that we're the cash cow and we're a transactional program. This is the general perception of part-time MBA programs across the industry, but because at any given time, there are over 400 people enrolled somewhere in the part-time program, we definitely contribute to this perception.

There are also a good number of "ticket punchers" in the part-time MBA program. They know they'll get a promotion at their current place of employment when they complete the program, and because of that, this is all this program is to them—a means to reach that goal. They're not here to network, they aren't too concerned about the curriculum because they are already working full-time during the day.

Pain-points for the full-time population aren't as strong as with the part-timers, in my opinion. Location is a huge one—just the fact that there is a perception that Minnesota is a fly-over state. And not necessarily somewhere that business actually happens. We know it's not a fly-over state, and so do our current students and alumni, but it does take some nurturing to get prospective students, especially ones who have never been to Minneapolis, to understand this.

Another one of our pain points is that we don't have a huge amount of school pride in the full-time MBA program. Because the Twin Cities are a vibrant community and have a lot going on, we attract a lot of students who already have families and choose the Carlson School because it will be a good fit for their family—the culture, lifestyle and things to do in the Twin Cities metro are very conducive to this. Where as, you have b-schools like Ithaca College in New York. MBA school becomes your life there—there's not a lot going on outside the school, so they've fostered a strong sense of community with that group. Those students really have drunk the Kool-Aid and they're entire lives for the 2 years of their MBA becomes all things related to the school.

**In regards to advertising and promotional materials, what has worked and what hasn't? Is there variability between the part-time and full-time program on this?**

Traditional print advertising hasn't really worked for us simply because we can't track it and it seemed like there was a lack of objective. We don't know if it's effective or not; we can only speculate here. We really need a prospect's name and email before we can even start to have usable analytics. Billboards have given the perception that we are made of a lot of money already. Doesn't really send the right message. And pretty much anything without a call-to-action hasn't worked.

I really think we're just getting to the point of having effective marketing efforts. Facebook advertising has worked for us for events. I'd like to see us expand more on that—and all things digital, really.

**Do you feel that the Carlson School's social media presence as well as other online storytelling presences play a role in MBA recruitment efforts? If so, how? If not, how could it in the future?**

Social media alone will not be successful, but we can't not be there. Social media really generates pride—we can foster this feel-good feeling of affinity with the school and this will be valuable whether you are a prospective recruit, current student, alumni or just a community member. We will be successful if we can effectively leverage our network of alumni and grow our overall affinity to the School.

We also want to make sure we're authentic to our brand voice in our recruiting efforts online, and this includes social media. We know how we sound and the message we're conveying when we're on the phone with recruits or communicating via email, but this is harder to convey through storytelling. And so important. This brand voice should be a personality and a force that is consistent across all of our messaging. But in order to get there, we have to know who we are and what message we want to convey. I think this would help people have a stronger relationship with our brand.

I also think we currently have a “set it and forget it” mentality with marketing and communications—especially on social media. We need to be more nimble and fluid—testing and finding what's effective.

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Transcriptions**

#### **Group 1: Full-Time MBA students**

Held April 17 at Carlson School. Focus group was made up of 6 students enrolled in the full-time MBA program, range of ages and majors, all had completed at least one year of program

#### **What led you to pursue your MBA?**

I was mentored by a couple of my clients at Padilla that staying in that client services area wasn't going to be fulfilling to me long-term, so they led me toward an MBA because it's more diverse and applicable. That's what inspired me. I always knew I wanted a grad degree, but hadn't decided on which one. When I was looking at programs, I thought I was going to go part-time. I was looking at Carlson Part-Time program and went to a mixer at Crave where I met Dan Bersh who talked me into looking at full time. He invited me to a recruiting weekend. It wasn't though anything online, not until I was interviewing here. I looked at Georgetown and Kellogg too and those I did look at online.

I was a government major in undergrad and didn't know I wanted to go into business. I fell into a general management role and found I loved corporate strategy but didn't have any education in it. So I decided to go back and do some schooling I actually wanted to do. My wife wanted to do it as well so we decided we would take turns. Her time in business school, I saw it was a lot of fun and I knew I wanted to do it. I applied to a couple of schools and around the same time, my wife got a job at General Mills and I had been looking at Carlson before that. I met Dan Bersh and he was awesome. I really liked how Carlson was in the city I wanted to be in and I liked the class size. My choice was between continuing to work or doing full time, but Carlson made it worth my while financially.

I used the website quite a bit. The law school advertises all the same statistics about salary averages right out of program, but that seemed a little inflated. It was important for me to see where people were going and what they were doing with their degrees. I followed up with some people here to see how inflated those claims were. The decision for me was about whether I could afford it and what opportunities it could provide. I wanted to be able to pursue the career of my choice, and Carlson really sold that online.

When I moved here, I knew I had to get an education in the United States if I wanted to go anywhere with my career. I looked at three different schools and started applications but wasn't committed enough to decide whether I should go full time or continue to work. I happened to meet Michele Weeser who was director of GBCC who always talked really favorably about Carlson. That was my first introduction to the school. Finally, I decided to apply just before the school year started and the fact that they admitted me at the time they did made the decision pretty easy.

I had an ROTC scholarship as an undergrad so I didn't have to think about what I wanted to do until much later. After I got out, I bounced around a lot. I realized I wanted to do finance and became a financial advisor, but didn't like it that much. I knew that in order to get a decent job in



finance, I'd have to get some more schooling. I looked for schools that valued military experience. I met Chip Altman who started getting me excited about Carlson.

I was working a civilian job (I'm National Guard), and I deployed in 2011. A few of my friends were going back for their MBAs so I started looking into that. I was all online research because I was overseas. I was originally focused on HBS, but I stopped because the application was so intense. You had to have your parents social security numbers and the application was ridiculous. So then I focused my attention on Kellogg and Duke but didn't consider Carlson. I thought about it because I was local, and considered it for my backup school. But then I found out about the Enterprise program and decided to apply. By the way, the application was so easy. They made it financially worth my time, so I came here.

**How did the Carlson School stand out from other programs? How could it have done this better?**

How small our community is and how close-knit we all are. There's 109 of us in our class and I know everyone on a first-name basis. With a smaller class, you get a lot of recruiters coming in and there's fewer people you're competing with.

Wes and I both went to Fall Preview Weekend and that was the moment I learned about Brand Enterprise, and for me, it made me feel a little better about getting off the ladder. Because I was still gaining valuable experience at the time. It sounds great, but it was a little less valuable than I thought it was going to be. So that was big. I've always been in small academic settings, so that was really appealing to me too. I knew I could do well as a big fish in a small pond. So that was super appealing to me to. And when I came, I really liked all the people I met. I did NOT have that experience at Kellogg. I didn't connect with the students or staff, I found the students to be rude and really disengaged. Nobody made any effort to talk to me or get to know me. I sat in on a class and was horrified at how little engagement there was. The professors were just reading from slides. At one point, I was watching a girl play Words with Friends. The students weren't friendly and the classroom experience was truly horrifying. And here it was like, everyone wanted to chat and hear your story, and everyone wants to know what questions you have. All the students just seemed very engaged. That engagement isn't one hundred percent of the time, but overall, I have been really impressed with the level of student engagement.

For me, when I was approaching schools, there were a couple criteria, the two main ones being rankings and location. My wife needed to work so I knew I had to be in a big metro area, so Duke wouldn't work for me. Then she got the offer in Minneapolis and we decided that was the city. For Carlson, rankings weren't as high as other schools, but the location was absolutely where I wanted to be. So I checked it out. I met the director of admissions at Harvard and she's the coldest, meanest person you've ever met in your life. I came here and Linh Gilles gave me a hug when I left. It's that personal interaction. My wife went to Harvard, and they have 900 students per class, and hey're doing amazing things at that school, but it's a factory: they push people out and it's very impersonal on a school level. But when I came here, it was person, small intimate, and the director of admissions gives you hugs. It was a better fit for me.

I liked the Funds Enterprise, it was a big draw. You get to practice and figure things out for yourself. I like the global discovery too, it's so important to see how things work in another

country. Throughout my career I've stayed pretty global. I haven't done it yet, but am looking forward to it.

Global discovery sounded really cool when I was a prospective student, but then when I got here, everyone crapped all over it. But then I went and found it to be super useful and very interesting. It was very hit or miss in terms of the content we actually engaged with, but the hits were big hits. I feel like there's something to be said for having a bit more visibility into what global discovery actually is and what the benefits are you get out of it. What you actually do. You learn a lot, we saw Ford and how they do business in China. We saw Dorsey and Whitney, so how service businesses do business in China. You get to see a lot of approaches to international business and I got way more out of it than I thought I would. Eventually they will change it so it's exactly like the part-time, so you can go overseas or take a class instead. And I think that would make a big difference because then you get people who WANT to go. Because it can be a pain. It is expensive, and so the message you get out of it is people complaining because they were forced to go. It's not just study abroad. It's a global experience that isn't necessarily a class.

I realized something about the school when I got here. They've got the Be. Belong. Become. campaign here. But this school actually is transformational. In my opinion, the higher ranked the school is, the less transformational it is. They've got a ton of students that come in from doing finance, and then they go into private equity. Here, I've seen a lot of people increase their earning potential pretty dramatically, get some pretty great jobs and it's a factor of the students that we have but also the style of the program as well. Also where we are in Minneapolis. But that was something that I didn't realize coming into this.

Coming into Carlson, based on my level of experience, there's no way I should have the job I ended up getting after this. Career services worked with me early on. The amount I've progressed in leadership, project management, confidence, and the relationships I've developed, it sounds corny, but I'm completely different in my abilities and as a person from the beginning to the end. Carlson is honestly the best decision I could have made for my career and my future. But it's all what you put into it. If you just sit on the sidelines and don't invest yourself, you don't get as much out of the experience.

I'd second the Funds Enterprise, because managing real money was very important to me. But the network is amazing. I wanted to stay in the Twin Cities, and here there's no better network than Carlson. I knew I wanted to be here.

I've been talking to a prospective student and she wants to live in the Twin Cities after. So Carlson is the only choice. We try very hard to be this non-regional school, but the fact is we are a regional school. We might have a little more success with people if we didn't try to be the school that promises jobs on the coast. We should focus on the fact that we have an amazing environment here.

**Do you think there's a disconnect between the communications and what the brand voice used in communications?**

I haven't seen much of communication from the school. (5 of 6 students agreed)

I didn't even know about the culture and the messaging as a prospective student. But now that I'm in school, I truly feel like it has been transformational. Now that I'm finding out about it later, I feel like it's the right message.

When I was looking at schools, when Carlson got the highest ranking for placement. To see HBS as number two and Carlson at one was awesome.

I think they try to be all things to all people. But I think a program of this size in this location with these sort of offerings has some unique differentiators, but they still try to be everything to everyone. I know I've been very happy here, and I think all have been successful within the program. I think the people who haven't been as successful feel they have been sold a false bill of goods. If you talked to international students, for example. I think if you talked to them about what they were promised coming in, it would be a different story than when you hear from all of us who have internships and got full-time jobs. If you talk to people who want jobs out of state, it's all on them to do that work. There is no real network of Carlson people. That kind of stuff, I understand they do it because they want to increase their yield and they want more applicants, but at the end of the day I think if you dug deeper into why people are unhappy, it would be because they were promised something they didn't get.

**If the Carlson School was a person, who would it be at a barbecue? Your mother in law? Your creepy neighbor? Your close friend?**

I think Carlson would be like your kindly uncle. This is a school where they want to do best by you. This is a school where if you have a problem, they want to hear about it and they're going to try their damndest to fix it. I find them to be very caring and warm, very affectionate. You can go to them for advice and help and maybe a little pocket change. They'll slip you a twenty at the end of the night.

I would say it's the uncle too. But I would say he's the guy who is always trying really hard but still gets shit on. He does something good but then somebody else beats him: he'll hit a triple, but then Harvard will come in and hit a home run. Or he'll do something nice for people, he'll cook the whole barbecue for everyone and they will all complain that it's not steaks it's hamburgers.

I'm thinking about the rankings and how they're trying really hard. It's a young uncle, something who is trying super hard to be in the cool kid group but just isn't quite accepted there yet.

I also wonder if Harvard at our barbecue at all? Like, really? Harvard and Stanford aren't there. They don't eat barbecue do they? Maybe if it's a lobster bake. Kelly, Ross, and Olin would be there. Should Harvard even be at the party? We weren't invited to their party.

**Who are the other b-schools at the barbeque, and who would they be? What are they doing at the party?**

Ross is your dick-ish grandpa that everyone shows up and everyone groans.

Yeah, and he thinks he's done everything better than you, even though you've done the same things. He's a retired cop and you're currently a cop, but he says he's the better cop because his rank was a little higher.

You would never have to ask him where he went to school, he would tell you right away.

Kelly is the life of the party but not very smart. Everybody loves Kelly when he walks in the room, Kelly's the coolest but there's not a lot of substance there.

**At that barbecue, how would Carlson spend his/her time? Talking with a lot with people? Keeping to his or herself?**

I think cooking for everyone, taking requests. They'd be trying to customize orders for everyone and make everyone happy.

The student body of Carlson would be sitting at the cooler. But Carlson the school would be doing something totally different. The School would say, "don't tell anyone about shotgunning the beers."

Carlson would be talking to everyone. There seems to be a lot of information sharing among those schools.

I think Carlson would talk to Ross, but Ross wouldn't talk to them. Northwestern, Carlson might be self conscious talking to them.

When I visited Duke, a lot of students said they didn't get into Northwestern, so they went to Duke. Then students at Northwestern said they didn't get into Harvard, so they went there. If they were all at the barbecue, they'd be like, "What's Harvard doing? What kinda shirt does he got on?" And Carlson would be like, "whatever man, I'm just happy to be here."

I feel like the Carlson person would be more confident. Say it's about to rain, I think Carlson wouldn't be worried about staying dry. They've got the student placement rates to cover them.

**Do any of you read any communications or seek information to stay in touch with the school?**

I'm on the homepage a lot, but that's kind of it.

I get emails from the graduate office at the U. But I don't consume a lot, because I'm here. But when I'm an alum I think I will sign up for a newsletter or sign up on Facebook.

I'm the same way, because I'm here all day, I look for stuff here.

I read the weekly MBA email newsletter.

Yeah I don't do anything, honestly.

Same, I don't read much of anything. I read emails though.

**Do you have any other thoughts on the program or the School that you'd like to share?**

I've noticed you guys try to turn the conversation toward the marketing message, but for me, what sold me was all personal. I was on Carlson's website a couple times, but it was all one to one interaction that sold me on the school. It really had nothing to do with a crafted marketing message.

I used the Internet a lot because I was overseas, and I tried to find as much touchpoints as I could, discussion forums and all kinds of stuff. Other schools' discussion boards had a ton of comments. But Carlson had only eight and it wasn't enough, I wanted more information. I ended up going to some Indian discussion forum and they had a lengthy discussion among Indian students about what Carlson was like. It wasn't enough.

When comparing schools I got a ton of information from Beat the GMAT. It was a lot of peer-to-peer information. The website doesn't give you a feel for the experience. I couldn't find any valuable information whatsoever. And looking at the list of clubs, about 24 percent of them don't exist anymore. The storytelling piece comes in on the website, and that's pretty solid. Those are more personal stories.

### **Group 2: Part-Time MBA students**

Held April 21 at Carlson School. Focus group was made up of 4 students enrolled in the part-time MBA program, all in a range of ages and professions. One participant was also a Carlson School employee.

#### **What led you to pursue your MBA?**

I had always been interested in doing some sort of a graduate degree but I wasn't actually thinking about doing the MBA until I took a job at the Carlson School, then once I had the job, I decided it would be wise to pursue my MBA while I was here. So I didn't really search out other Universities because I was here already.

I had gotten laid off from a job and decided to move to the Twin Cities, and when I started looking for jobs I realized so many of the positions I was seeking required an MBA. The positions and starting salaries were wider with an MBA. I knew I had to get a job when I moved so I could pay rent. When I found an organization and found out they did tuition reimbursement, that's when I got on board. Prior to that, I didn't want to go back to school. I value experience a lot, so I didn't know if there was really a value having an undergrad degree in business to learn more from an MBA, but money talks and reputation talks. Being in the area, I didn't look anywhere else, but I ultimately made the decision based on reputation.

I'd wanted to go back to school and the five year time frame was about right but it wasn't until I started with P&G and learned about their tuition reimbursement that I decided to go. So I waited six months and hit the ground running. Between Minnesota schools, I went to info sessions at Carlson, Bethel and St. Thomas and did tons of website searching. Then I sat down with different people at my jobs who had gone to each of the schools and kind of evaluated which I was looking for.

I knew I wanted to eventually go back to school, I just wasn't sure exactly which program. I graduated in communications. I assumed I would go back for another strategic communications

degree. But after some experience in my job in higher ed after college, my colleagues recommended a business degree to get tools they didn't have. So understanding how to speak business and how to do budgeting and statistics and all that kind of stuff. So after some experience in my current roles and speaking with managers, I felt like the MBA would provide better experience for where I wanted to go in my career as opposed to a communications degree. I looked at St. Thomas for a business communications degree. Looking back, if I had to choose again, I would choose Carlson just because of the networking and connections Carlson has across the country, it's really appealing.

**How did Carlson stand out from other programs?**

I would say two things: the people I knew that graduated from this program were of a different caliber and were doing things I'd like to be doing with my life. They were more connected and had the savvy compared to some other schools. I liked how Carlson has the academic and experience component. Some of the other schools felt a little more heavy on the experience background, but I thought Carlson did a nice job of combining those two and balancing that out.

All of my undergrad friends went to the Carlson program, and I've seen how they've been successful in their careers and what they've been able to achieve. I guess that's one thing. For me, since it was employment that drew me here, it still got me interested in this institution. But I've always known how well networked Carlson is in the business community. It's clear out in the community that those strong business ties already exist. So that was something that was very important to me when I came here. Being here as an employee and a student, you're really connecting across the whole Twin Cities.

Aside from employment, reputation is a big deal. I have a lot of friends who had heard of the reputation and the ties that they had with the community. With the part-time program, so many of the companies around here have individuals from those companies that come here and that really fosters the discussions you have in the classrooms. Looking back, that really is a very valuable asset in itself, you might not have that at other business schools. I'm sure St. Thomas has that too, but the reputation isn't as prevalent.

The reputation that Carlson has in the Twin Cities is that it's really connected to a lot of the companies I'm interested in. Also, colleagues that I have and other people in my industry who have gone to Carlson just felt like they were at a different level as far as business understanding and where they were at in their career and that was appealing to me.

I had heard if you want to stay in Minnesota, St. Thomas and Carlson can be comparable, they have a similar reputation. But if you want to get outside the state or outside the country, Carlson is the way to go.

**What do you hope to get out of the program?**

I think "the talk," the communication and presentation skills are important. There's something to be said about people who have those skills. I hope the relationships I form are organic. It's not pushy and shovy. You're in the grunt of it together and I hope the caliber of people you're with build networks in that way.

I'm just looking to be a well-rounded business professional. My undergrad was in international relations and so to add the business intelligence and understanding of business process, it makes me a more well-rounded employee in general. It goes back to the presentation skills and being more confident in relationship building and networking and the business development aspect. And just knowing my stuff: being intelligent and being able to talk about things because I understand it and I'm confident in those areas.

I didn't think about this coming into it, but now that I'm about to do my global discovery program, the topic we're studying is sustainability and now I'm getting really interested in it. And I'd love to leverage that in my next job opportunity a little more. In general, I want to be more strategic, my undergrad gave me a good baseline for business, but the MBA program really does a good job of thinking bigger and setting long-term objectives and being able to translate that strategy into tangible takeaways.

For me, again, I really wanted to learn the business skills I felt I was missing from my undergrad. I really wanted to learn the business skills I felt like I was missing from my undergrad. Becoming a more well-rounded employee, being able to combine communications with an understanding of business strategy and be able to speak intelligently to it with my colleagues and supervisors was a big deal. As far as networking, one of the things I really hoped to gain from the program was building relationships with classmates that would then translate to being able to call them up to talk about a business problem we're both having but from different perspectives. Someone in a totally different industry struggling with the same problem I am, and being able to meet for coffee. Building a community like that in the Twin Cities is also really appealing.

**Has the school lived up to its reputation?**

I think I have some friendly suggestions for the administration, but overall I think it does a good job. I have friends with no business backgrounds and they think it's very helpful. But for me it was a lot of refresher courses, especially with the accounting and financial side of things. The networking is hard, it's a catch 22 with the relationships you build as a part-timer since you do have a job and then you have class and some people have kids, so that's always a struggle, because the people you want to meet aren't going to those events. As far as the administration is concerned, I think they're doing everything they can to foster that. That's tough.

I'm pretty early in the program, but so far I feel it meets my expectations.

I've tried to go to one networking event a month and it's been good. The big events don't necessarily help you meet someone you'll know long-term, but they were good opportunities for me to get my feet wet. The faculty have been good. And I like the size of the classes, it's kind of fun to have that range of diversity. Everyone has been very open to meet and talk and extend themselves, which has been great, a bit surprising to be honest.

I would say as far as the academic side, coming from a non-business background, I think the program has been hugely beneficial. I've seen things I've learned in the program apply to my everyday job within the first two semesters. I feel like the biggest benefit has been the academic side. I would say networking, I haven't done very many of the events that the part-time program holds. And I don't know if it's just because I'm not interested in all of them or if the timing just

hasn't worked out, so I can't really speak a whole lot to them. But I think the classroom networking and doing group projects and talking to people in class has been the largest amount of networking and relationship building that I've done. I would like to see the event side of it or the planned networking piece grow a little bit, but I don't know how that looks.

**What opportunities or resources could the School provide that would enrich your experience?**

There's just such a segregation between the full-time and part-time events and opportunities, and I think that's kind of a missed opportunity, it doesn't seem as cohesive. I think as a school, it's not seen as the MBA program, it's seen as more segmented.

I went to one of the LAB open houses and it was for part-timers, but I was confused about what was going on, so clarity in the leadership groups would be great. But I'm still curious what that looks like, for part-timers to be involved in a manageable commitment. If there were stories of people who have done it well, that could be helpful so see how others have balanced this with life. Some people have kids and spouses, and people are all over the spectrum. There's just people all over which is awesome. But stories would be really cool to see.

In general, information sharing in general is important. I think it's important for students to get the most important information in an accessible form. Students are going to the intranet and Moodle and all these websites where there's information for students, and I don't think it's always very clear where students should go. I think they're trying to figure out how to find very basic information. I think that's something the program could do better.

I second that.

I would third the information find perspective. I think it's really hard to find the most basic information that a student might need, as simple as curriculum planning documents. I find them, but I have to search every time to find them. And that's a little bit frustrating. I also think, however I'm different from other students, but I get the perception that the full-time program is very structured and they have a curriculum that's planned each year and career activities that take place every semester, and I feel like the part-time program is so a la carte, do it yourself that it's so easy to not use the resources at hand because maybe a student might not be aware of them or know how to engage them. I feel like a little more clarification or direction about when and how to engage and who's the right person to talk to, at least for students who are interested in having a little more structure around their part-time experience.

**If the Carlson School was a person, who would it be at a barbecue? Your mother in law? Your creepy neighbor? Your close friend?**

As a precursor, I thought before I came here, I had an idea of what a Carlson person was like. And it was a bit stuck up. Talking about themselves and their achievements or sitting on a pedestal. But since being here, I've met a wide variety of people that are humble and very down to Earth. Maybe other schools are coming to the barbecue with that expectation.

Even though I know it not to be true, I think there may still be a pocket of Carlson students that are a little stuck up. But I think I'd still say the majority of people at this barbecue are really



smart, educated, intelligent, conversational, and open to talking about a wide variety of topics. When I first think of it, I think of that really intelligent conversation.

Prior to being a student, I do think people see it as just a building with robots in black suits who are all being very professional and a little bit stuffy perhaps. But what I feel like the experience of the school really is are people who are incredibly strategic thinkers, and very entrepreneurial and innovative, very friendly and in to relationship building. So I guess that's how I imagine Carlson would be at a barbecue.

I think there's a lot of diversity, not so much in terms gender and ethnic diversity, but I think mostly world travelers. I've met a lot of people that have travelled for work or pleasure, and are very cultured and know what's going on outside of Minnesota, they're not all from the Midwest. It's good to see a diverse group. I was really surprised to meet a lot of engineers and people in IT, that weren't used to being in suits all the time. Half the population will be in suits and ties, the other half will be in Hawaiian shirts.

**Who are the other b-schools at the barbeque, and who would they be? Mother in law? Creepy neighbor, etc.?**

I honestly don't know that much about them. I only went to public schools, so my thoughts on a private school leads me to believe they have a smaller network. I heard they do a lot more work, which I thought was interesting. So I don't think they're as focused on the networking or social aspect and they're a bit more studies driven, but beyond that, I don't know.

I think of St. Thomas as academic, maybe because of the private school having more of that prestige or feeling like there's honor going to a private school. I also just imagine them as well connected by their location in downtown to the Twin Cities, but I don't know if I would imagine them as being as worldly and cultured internationally as Carlson.

I don't know a ton about St. Thomas or the program, I didn't do a whole lot of looking and I don't know their size. But my perception without knowing it is the program is a bit smaller than Carlson so the students might know fewer St. Thomas students in their classes than a Carlson student.

**What is your sense of the School's communication with part-time students? Too much, too little?**

I don't think the communication is enough. I get a lot of information just being on the staff side and I then turn around and tell the MBA office to put in the newsletter. They probably don't track how many people DO read that. When I was first in the program, I was looking for friends too. They put a small blurb about the tailgating the sports club did, and it was probably more full-time focused but open to everybody. And I went with my boyfriend and we had a great time, I was wondering why there weren't more part-timers there. I don't think they highlight some of those fun events, you don't have to always be on your networking game. The weekly newsletter is good, but I don't know if I've heard much more outside of that.

I read that newsletter every week. It is good, and I guess if there's anything I need to know about the program, I'm hoping it's all there. If it isn't, then I don't do additional research to seek it out.

I think they could build the intranet to be a bit more dynamic where you have the highlights, but then you could have all these things that are easier to get to. I think it's underutilized.

I would agree with the email piece. I think the once a week newsletter is super helpful and I read that regularly. I think the intranet is my biggest problem as far as communications, just not being able to intuitively find things. I think they could do a better job organizing it and making the navigation more user friendly.

There is an underground professor blog that gets shared from student to student, it's like a master Google doc that is very helpful when you're trying to figure out which classes to take because there are so many to choose from because it's kind of a create-your-own schedule.

I would say that I would go to the website probably a lot more as a student if it was easier to know where there was information that was relevant to a student on there. When we get to the point of designing a new website, if as a student I knew which part of the website I could find relevant information, that would be great as well. Especially for event calendars, I'm thinking.

Event calendars aren't so intuitive on the website.

Even having a Google calendar that the part-time community could share, that would be nice.

I realize you're supposed to use the career center's Talent Link for finding some of that stuff, but that's not an intuitive system to use either. So it's not where you're going to go looking for events.

**Do you have any other thoughts on the program or the School that you'd like to share?**

Recently there was a class that got randomly cancelled and registration was right around the corner. I heard it through the grapevine, but the school never sent us anything. I think a bit more transparency in terms of big changes that might affect us is needed.

**Appendix C**

**INSERT CONTENT ANALYSIS EXCEL SHEETS**

**Appendix D**

Carlson School of Management PTMBA Student Experience Mapping

**Schools**

Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)  
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)  
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)  
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)  
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)  
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)  
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)  
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)  
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)  
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)  
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)  
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)  
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)

Categories	Code	Elements
Location		1 Mentions the location of the campus, sells the location/community
Value		2 Mentions price, scholarships, monetary reference
Academics		3 Mentions staff or faculty, specific programming, USPs
Opportunities		4 Mentions job placement, international experience, extra curriculars
Affinity		5 Mentions students or alumni through general/otherwise not categorizeable brand storytelling

Sample	Post description	Date of post	Code	Verified	If not, keep code?
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Faculty research	13-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Promoting commencement	12-May	5	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Opportunities for MBA in medical industry	12-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Highlighting development near campus	11-May	1	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Highlighting Minneapolis community	9-May	1	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Highlighting rankings	8-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Highlighting admissions option for MBA	7-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Staff in the news	7-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Faculty research	6-May	3	X	
Carlson School of Management (University of Minnesota)	Faculty in the news	5-May	3	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Commemorating MN Business Ethics Day	13-May	1	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Highlights student start-up	12-May	4		X
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Staff blog	9-May	3	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Faculty research	9-May	3	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Students win competition	7-May	4	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Highlights local orgs. affiliated with school	6-May	1	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Women MBA club	5-May	4	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Highlighting alum who works at Piper Jaffray	2-May	4	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Article about weather affecting business	1-Apr	5	X	
Opus School of Business (St. Thomas)	Staff blog	28-Apr	3	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Dean in the news	13-May	3	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Student explains why he chose Kellogg	12-May	4	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Highlighting enterprises donor	9-May	3	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Dean speaking quote	8-May	3	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Highlighting entrepreneur course	7-May	3	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Highlighting alums and students who are driving social change	5-May	4	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Alumni reunion photo album	3-May	4	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Highlighting notable alumni	2-May	4	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	Highlighting alumni reunion	1-May	4	X	
Kellogg School of Management (Northwestern University)	International experience, student photos on Instagram	30-Apr	4	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Encouraging grads to donate	12-May	2	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	International experience article	8-May	4		X
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Events photo album	7-May	5	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Encouraging grads to donate	6-May	2	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Events photo album	6-May	5	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Highlighting what's happening that week in MBA building	5-May	1	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Students in a competition	2-May	4	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	International experience	1-May	4	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Encouraging grads to donate	30-Apr	2	X	
Wisconsin School of Business (University of Wisconsin)	Highlighting what's happening that week in MBA building	28-Apr	1	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	International experience, student photos on Instagram	12-May	4	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Mother's Day message	11-May	5	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Entrepreneurship program	8-May	3	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Alumni event to discuss investment topics	7-May	4	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Promoting executive MBA program to alumni	5-May	2	X	

Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Graduation photo booth album	2-May	5	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Commencement promotion	1-May	5	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Faculty visiting the White House	30-Apr	3	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Congratulatory message for executive MBA grads	28-Apr	5	X	
Ross School of Business (University of Michigan)	Highlighting where students will intern over the summer	23-Apr	4	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Highlighting international experience	13-May	4	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Promoting a webinar academic series	12-May	3	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Highlighting alum who works at IBM	9-May	4	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Commencement promotion	9-May	5	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Senior academic award winners	8-May	3	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Discussing boring colors of MBA regalia	7-May	5	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	MBA banquet photo album	6-May	5	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Encouraging message for finals week	5-May	5	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Encouraging grads to share photos from commencement	5-May	5	X	
Kelley School of Business (Indiana University)	Promoting MBA rankings	1-May	3	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting alum who created a start-up	7-May	4	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting entrepreneur course	7-May	3		X
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Students win competition	6-May	4	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Start-up competition winner	6-May	4	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting building expansion	1-May	1	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting garden outside MBA building	1-May	1	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Faculty in the news	1-May	3	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting student international experience	30-Apr	4	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Facebook contest for students highlighting new MBA buildings	29-Apr	1	X	
Olin School of Business (Washington University in St. Louis)	Highlighting student start-up competition	25-Apr	4	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Commencement photo album	13-May	5	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Faculty in the news	12-May	3	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Entrepreneurship competition	12-May	3	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Commencement promotion	8-May	5	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Commencement promotion	7-May	5	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Students and professors event	5-May	3	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Students win competition	5-May	4	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Entrepreneurship competition	3-May	3	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Faculty blog	2-May	3	X	
McCombs School of Business (University of Texas)	Entrepreneurship program competition	2-May	3	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Alumni in the news	13-May	4	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Promoting master's programming	13-May	3	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Professor in the news	12-May	3	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Commencement speaker promotion	9-May	5	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Professor in the news	7-May	3	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Photos of Pittsburgh	6-May	1	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Congratulatory message for MBA grads	5-May	5	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Pittsburgh is a green city in US	2-May	1	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Webinar promoting MBA programming	2-May	3	X	
Tepper School of Business (Carnegie Mellon University)	Highlighting summer course	1-May	3	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Notable alum	13-May	4	X	



Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Entrepreneurship challenge	13-May	3	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Alum in the news	12-May	4	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Entrepreneurship student challenge	12-May	3	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Promoting school event	10-May	4	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Notable alum	9-May	4	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	School blog	9-May	3	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Professor blog	8-May	3	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Highlighting a notable alum	8-May	4	X	
Booth School of Business (University of Chicago)	Entrepreneurship student challenge	7-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Faculty blog	13-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Promoting rankings	12-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Highlighting spring weather	8-May	1	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	School magazine	7-May	5		Change to 5
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Faculty in the news	6-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Faculty research	5-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Faculty blog	2-May	3	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Commencement promotion	1-May	5	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Notable alum	1-May	4	X	
McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University)	Notable alumni	30-Apr	4	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Notable alum	12-May	4	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Faculty in the news	12-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Military MBA promotion	12-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Staff Q&A	12-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Promoting food on campus	9-May	1	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Professor lecture promotion	8-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	MBA class photo	7-May	5	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Faculty in the news	6-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Promoting rankings	5-May	3	X	
Tuck School of Business (Dartmouth College)	Highlighting board of overseers	5-May	3	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Executive MBA classes	13-May	3	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Students win competition	13-May	4	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Highlighting student retreats	12-May	5	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Sharing student experiences	11-May	4	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Global enterprise program promotion	9-May	3	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	International experience	9-May	4	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Staff blog	9-May	3	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	Orientation welcome	8-May	5	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	International experience	8-May	4	X	
Johnson Graduate School of Management (Cornell University)	International experience	8-May	4	X	

# Carlson School of Management PTMBA Student Experience Mapping

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**CARLSON** Ventures ENTERPRISE

## Final Deck

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*December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

**CARLSON**  
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

# Contents

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• Executive Summary & Overview	3
• Key Experiences	6
• Persona Development	8
• Persona Experiences	13
• Ticket Puncher	14
• Deep Diver	17
• Integrator	20
• Professional Networker	23
• General Population Experiences	26
• Experience Gap Analysis	33
• Recommendations	36
• Suggested Next Steps	57
• Appendix	60
• Appendix Contents	61

# Executive Summary & Overview

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# Executive Summary

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The Carlson Ventures Enterprise (CVE) was engaged to help CSOM better understand the segments of students that make up the PTMBA population. CVE's work provides CSOM with a more holistic view of the population along with its constituents' wants and needs. CVE's findings and recommendations help identify and address deep dissatisfactions with the PTMBA program, determine the highest valued dimensions of the program, and aide in making Carlson the best it can be at the identified value offering.

The CVE team based their work off an experience mapping process described by Professor Jeanne Liedtka at the 2012 GMAC Annual Conference in her presentation "Using Student Experience Mapping to Improve Your Program."

"Experience mapping focuses on tracing the customer's 'journey' as he or she interacts with an organization in the process of receiving a service, with special attention to the emotional highs and lows."

-Jeanne Liedtka

The team conducted a number of brainstorming sessions, in-depth student interviews, student shadowing / journaling sessions, expert interviews, and secondary research initiatives to gather key insights about the PTMBA experience. The team used this information to map out the PTMBA journey as a set of high and low experiences.

# Methodology

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## 1. Insight Gathering

- Conducted 16 in-depth student interviews
- Shadowed 2 students before and during class
- Asked 6 students to emotionally-journal their daily life experiences

## 2. Expert / Stakeholder Interviews

- Interviewed stakeholders, experts, student leaders, and competition to identify orthodoxies, perceived capabilities, best practices, and competitive benchmarking
- Compared/contrasted stakeholder insights with insights gathered through student interviews

## 3. Secondary Research

- Analyzed Programs Office/LAB survey information to identify internal trends and pain points
- Interpret internal information to detail program structure, timeline, and offerings
- Performed competitive benchmarking to identify additional insights

## 4. Persona Development

- Identified 2 primary psychographic axes based on student behavior and perceptions
- Developed 4 core personas who share similar perceptions and decision making behavior

## 5. Experience Mapping / Gap Analysis

- Identified 11 key experiences that together, constitute the PT MBA experience
- Plotted emotional high points and low points (and relative importance) for each persona
- Identified major gaps between student experiences and perceived importance

## 6. Ideation Sessions / Insight Synthesis

- Hosted 3 ideation sessions with stakeholders, current PT students, and LAB members
- Generated idea fragments, discussed pain points, and solicited input
- Formed a set of recommendations for 9 of the 11 experience areas.

# Key Experiences

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# Key Experiences

Through brainstorming, secondary research, and interviews, the CVE team determined 11 key experiences areas that define the PTMBA journey.

Orientation	Course Planning	Classroom Experience	Curriculum & Program	Daily Life at Carlson	
Pre-Orientation Usefulness / Content First Impressions Scheduling Takeaways	Course Choices Emphasis Scheduling Options Registration Academic Advising Books Format Options	Class & Break Homework Peers Attendance Professor Expectations Support Grading	Syllabus Experiential Learning Theory vs. Application Core & Track Structure Tuition & Finances Feedback Responsiveness Administration School Pride Creation	Commute & Parking Eating Technology Physical Space Studying Access Communication Interaction with FT Payment Systems Other Services	
Professional Networking	Social Interaction	Group Work	Career Services	Global Enrichment	Graduation
Company Exposure Peer Networking Professional Development Faculty Networking Alumni Networking	Clubs / Student Orgs Community Events Competitiveness Friendships Leadership Dev.	Level of Group Work Project Mgmt. Time Mgmt. Group Work Tech Communication Work Sessions Diversity & peers	CAS, ORC, & Summit Info Session / Events GBCC Engagement Conferences / Fairs International Support Applying Offer Negotiation Acceptance GBCC Services	Planning Prep / Class work Trip Financing Time Away GLocal	Scheduling Starting a New Career Raise / Promotion Adjusting Recognition



# Persona Development

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# Psychographic Axis Development

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CVE considered a number of behavioral factors to determine the best axes.

	Introvert	↔	Extrovert
	Open explorer	↔	Laser focus
	Embrace debate	↔	Avoid debate
	Culturally malleable	↔	Culturally rigid
	Ask for help	↔	Help yourself
	High confidence	↔	High humility
Primary Axes	Externally committed	↔	Available
	Extension of career	↔	Extension of life
	Dominant culture	↔	Micro culture
	Pragmatic learner	↔	Holistic learner
	Free-flower	↔	Structure & control

# Psychographic Axes

---

Research indicates two primary axes drive student behavior and perception. A third axis influences decision making to a lesser extent.

## Primary Axes

### Extension of Career

- More likely to view MBA as a training opportunity and tool
- Value on MBA outcome
- School feels like “Working overtime”

### *View of MBA Experience*

### Extension of Life

- Considers all elements of MBA experience (community, academic, career)
- Values the “student experience”

### Externally Committed

- External commitments tend to drive decisions
- Flurry of other responsibilities deter Carlson engagement

### *Priority of Program*

### Available

- Low opportunity cost for being active at Carlson
- Willing to carve out time

## Secondary Axes

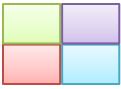
### Open Explorer

- Likely to change roles when finishing their MBA

### *Career Objective*

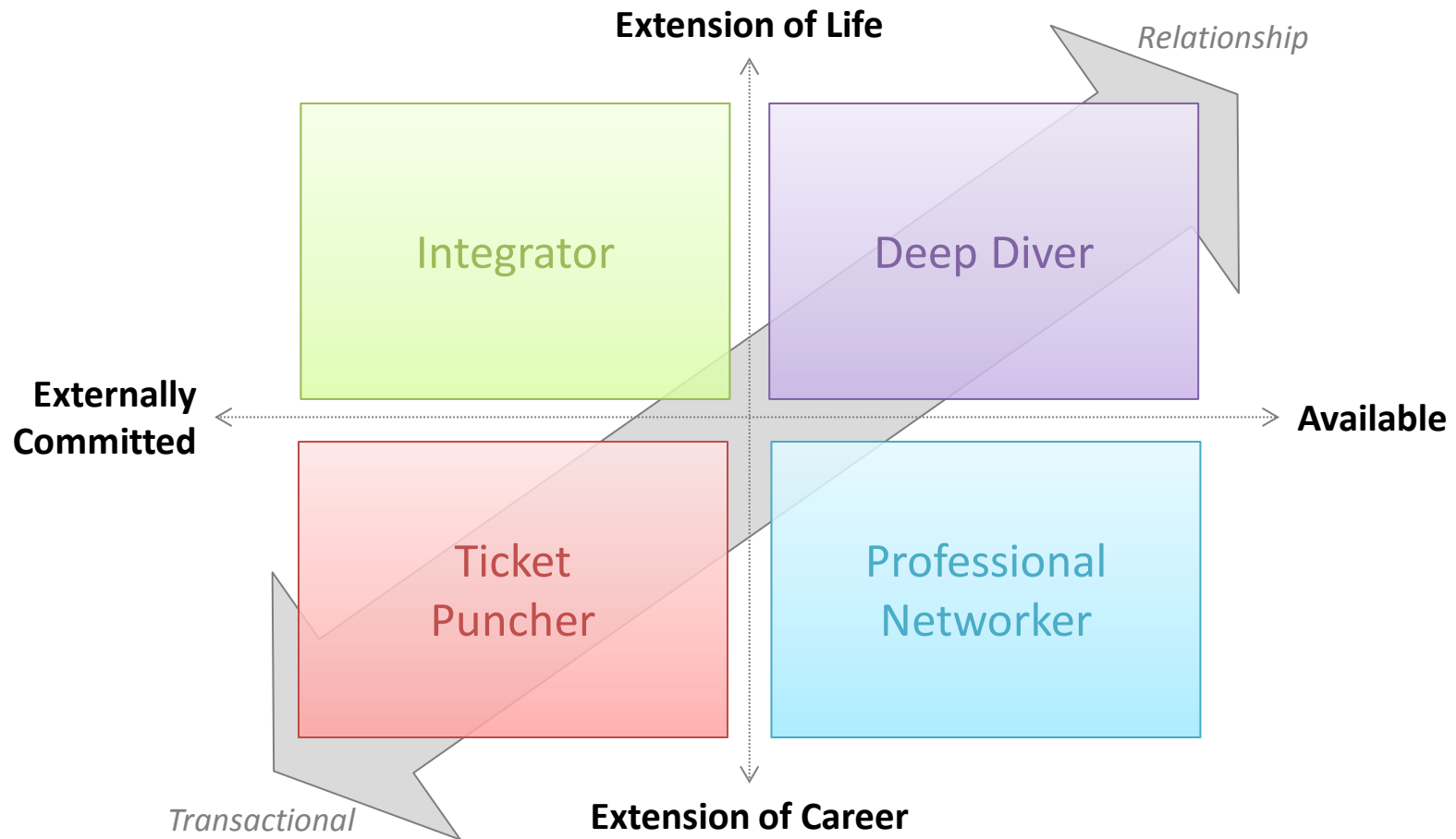
### Laser Focus

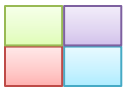
- Looking for a promotion or deeper understanding of a function



# Personas

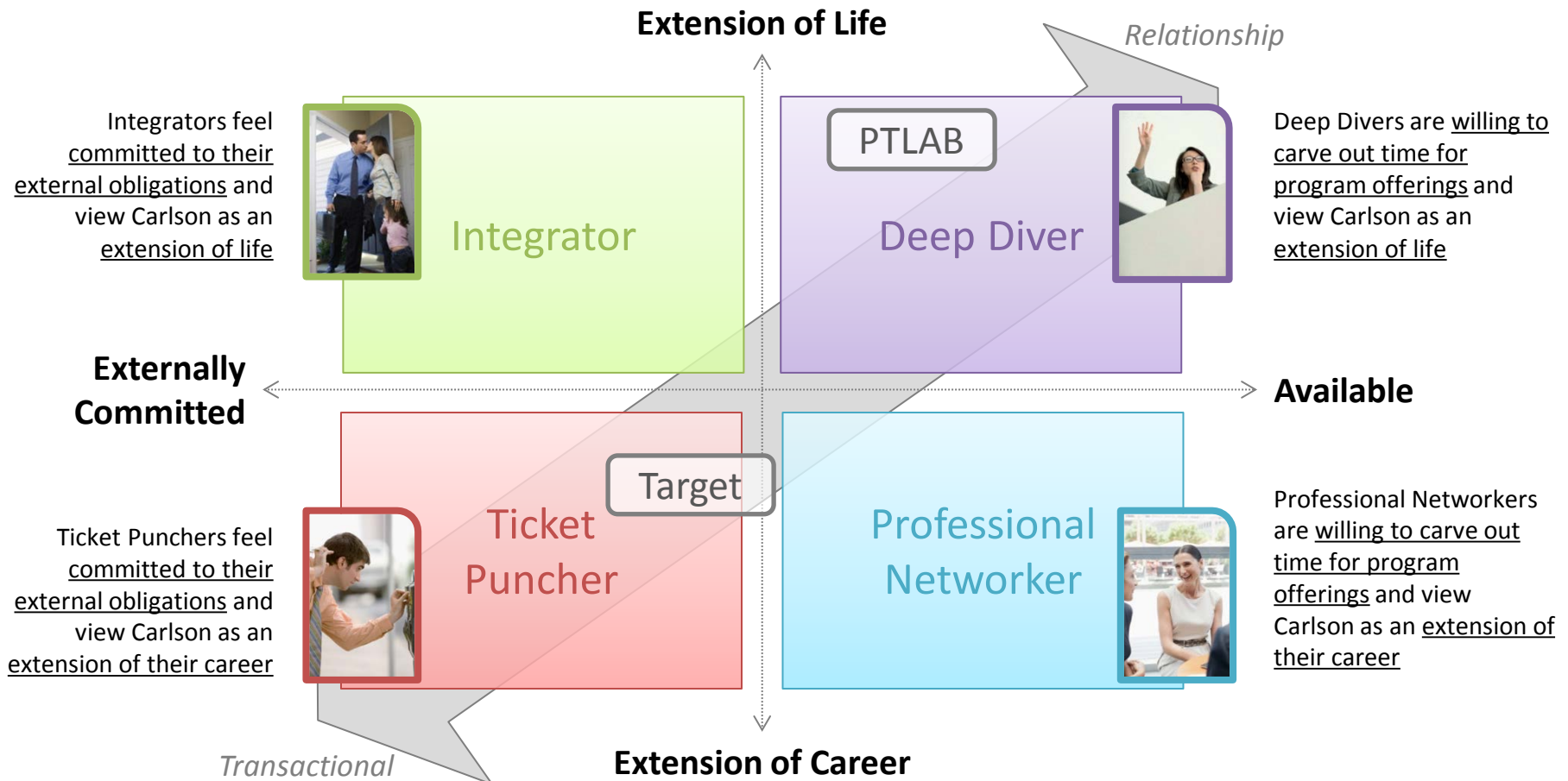
Plotting the primary psychographic axes together yields four behavioral archetypes. The team noticed a trend in relational vs. transactional experiences and identified the general location of two large constituent groups.





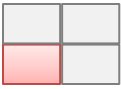
# Personas

Primary axes indicate four core personas who share similar perceptions and decision making behavior.



# Persona Experiences

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# Ticket Puncher Persona

Ticket Punchers feel committed to their external obligations and view Carlson as an extension of their career.

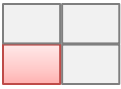
## Motivations & Values

Focused on furthering their careers through promotions/leadership roles (vs. switching companies or careers), Ticket Punchers pursue an MBA in order to sharpen their skills and become well-rounded managers. In many cases, an MBA is a prerequisite for their desired role or career path at work. They're committed to their external obligations and tend to prioritize around these obligations.



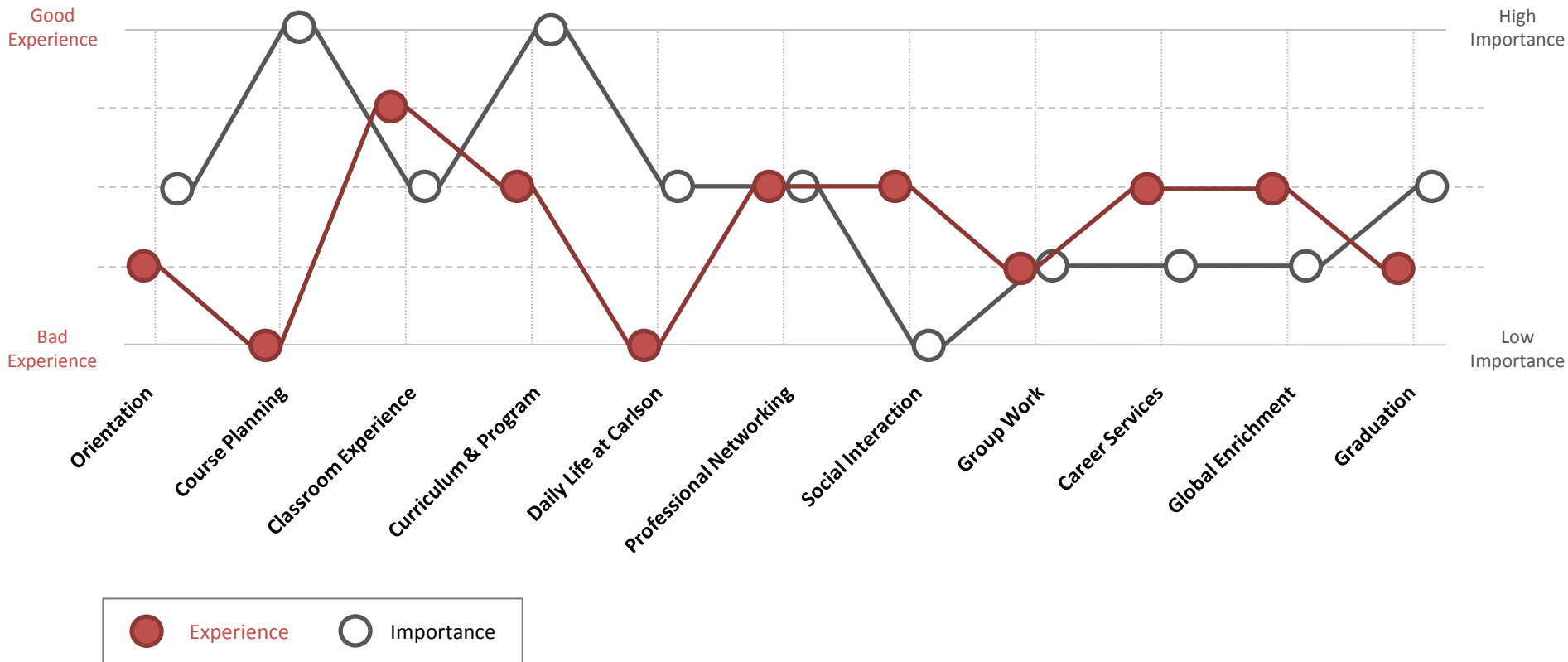
## Key Behavioral Insights

- *I've been working for 5 years, and getting my MBA seemed like the next logical step. Plus, all the group managers have their MBAs.*
- *I'd prefer not to work in groups with other people from my company, but I find myself doing it, out of necessity. It's so much easier.*
- *For me, a lot of the course work is review, but I've been impressed with the quality of the faculty. It's nice to get a fresh perspective.*
- *I find it very difficult working with students who only want an A. They have unrealistic expectations of others. Some don't even work full-time.*

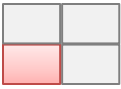


# Ticket Puncher Experience Map

Ticket Punchers place highest importance on flexibility and value of the program, but have had lackluster experiences.

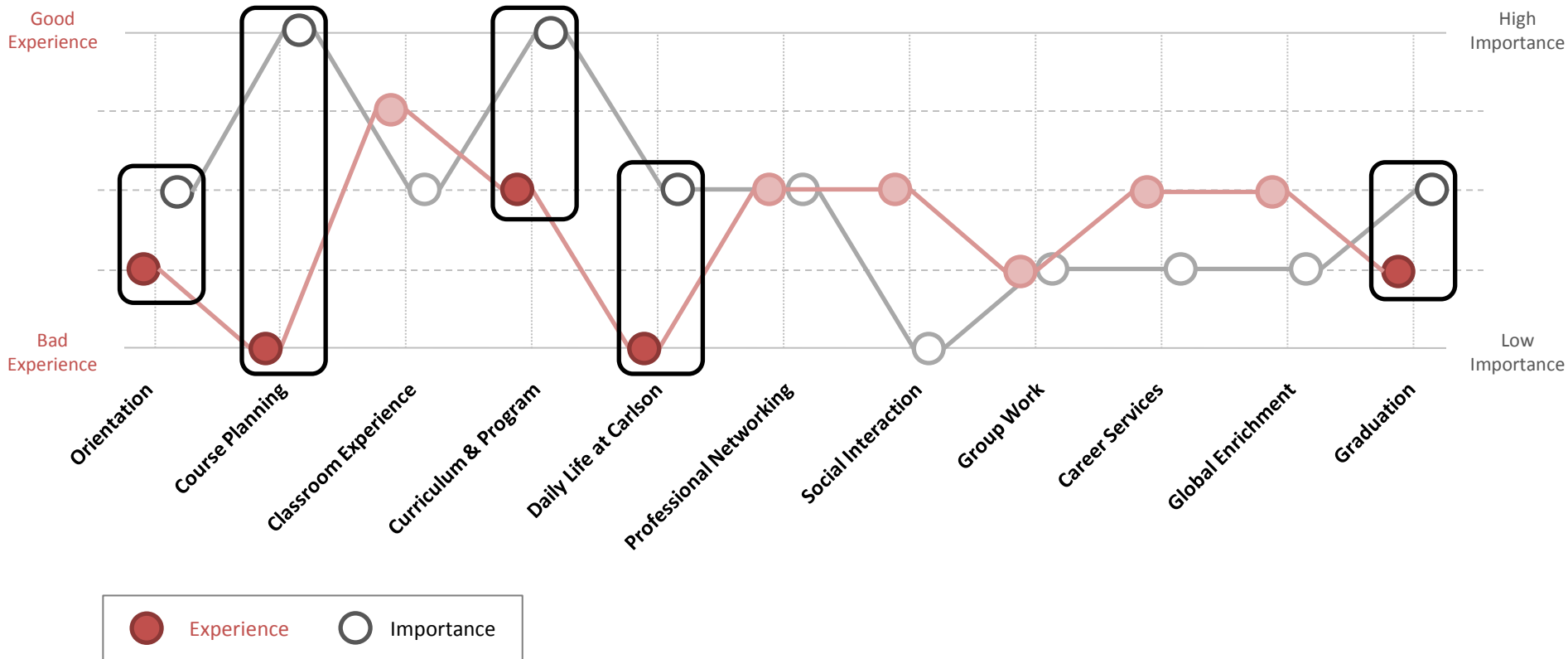


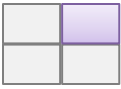




# Ticket Puncher Gap Analysis

A visual comparison of importance and experience show opportunities for improvement in five key experience areas.





# Deep Diver Persona

Deep Divers are willing to carve out time for program offerings and view Carlson as an extension of life.

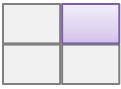


## Motivations & Values

Similar, in many respects, to full-time MBA students, Deep Divers seek the “full MBA experience.” They openly embrace the program offerings, and view Carlson as an extension of life (vs. extension of career.) They’re proud to be a Carlson student, and feel a sense of responsibility to the school. Deep Divers seek to develop deeply rooted subgroups and networks within the program.

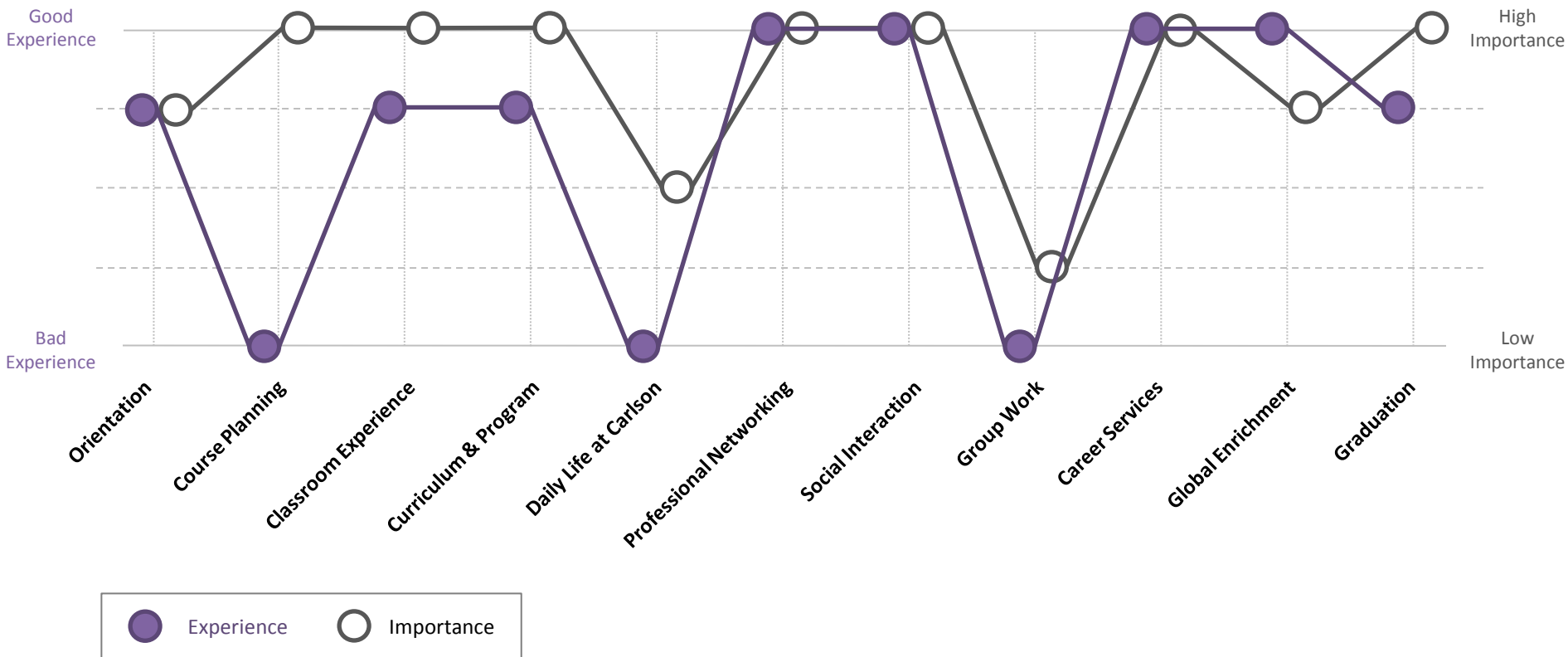
## Key Behavioral Insights

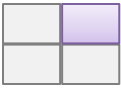
- *Students who are here only for the diploma are wasting their time- and money. They shouldn't even be admitted.*
- *This is not a hobby for me. I want an A. I want the highest A. It makes me angry when students don't put in the work.*
- *The administration treats the PTMBA program as an afterthought... We pay for the FT program.*
- *I'm paying \$X per credit hour. It's frustrating wehn professors cut class short, or don't make efficient use of class time.*
- *There must be some way for PT students to participate in the Enterprises.*



# Deep Diver Experience Map

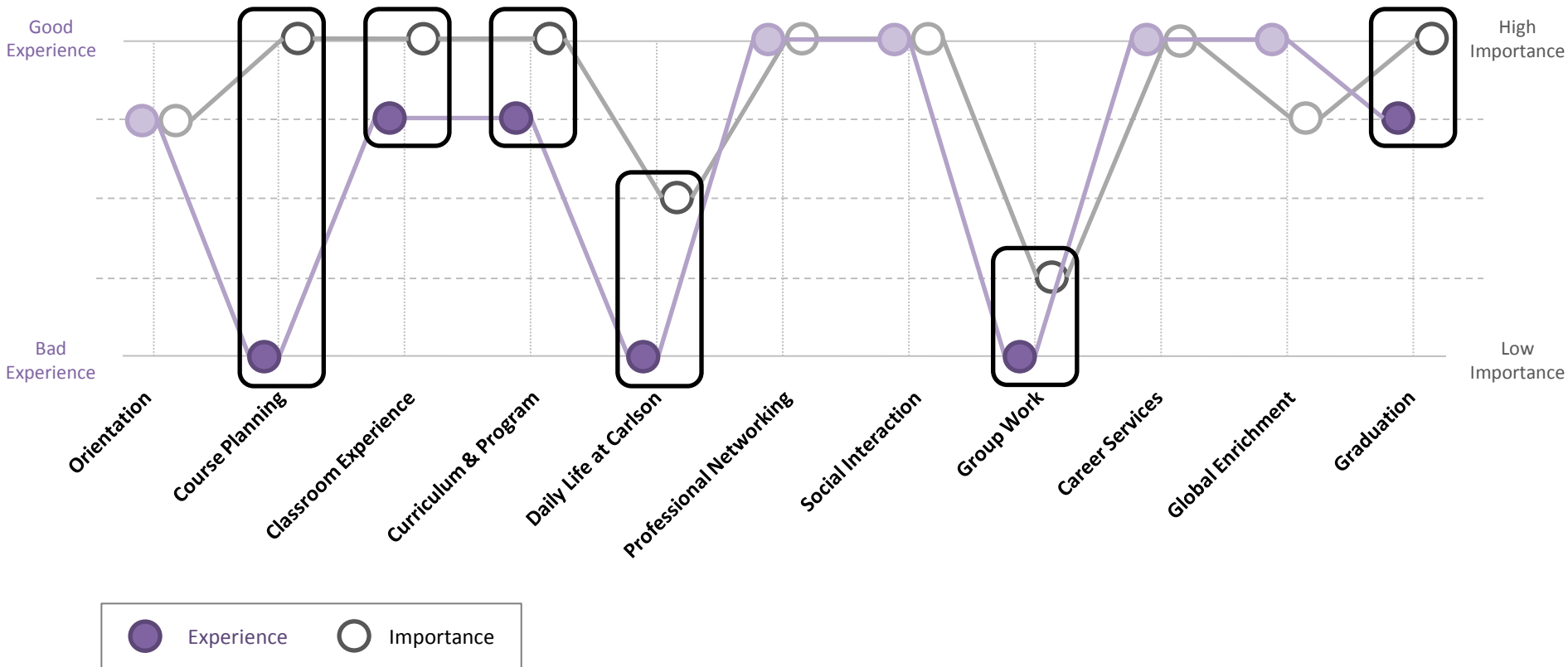
Deep Divers place high importance on the fundamentals of the program and have high expectations that have not been met.

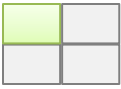




# Deep Diver Gap Analysis

Deep Divers place high importance on the fundamentals of the program and have high expectations that have not been met.





# Integrator Persona

Integrators feel committed to their external obligations and view Carlson as an extension of life.

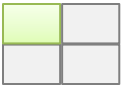
## Motivations & Values

While committed to their external obligations, Integrators see the MBA program as an extension of life. They're willing to engage in program-related activities, provided these activities have a high enough interest based "ROI", and fit into their schedule. For some, the MBA program is a nice escape from their day-to-day responsibilities. LAB and PSN may not appeal to them, but Integrators may be drawn to a more focused offering.

## Key Behavioral Insights

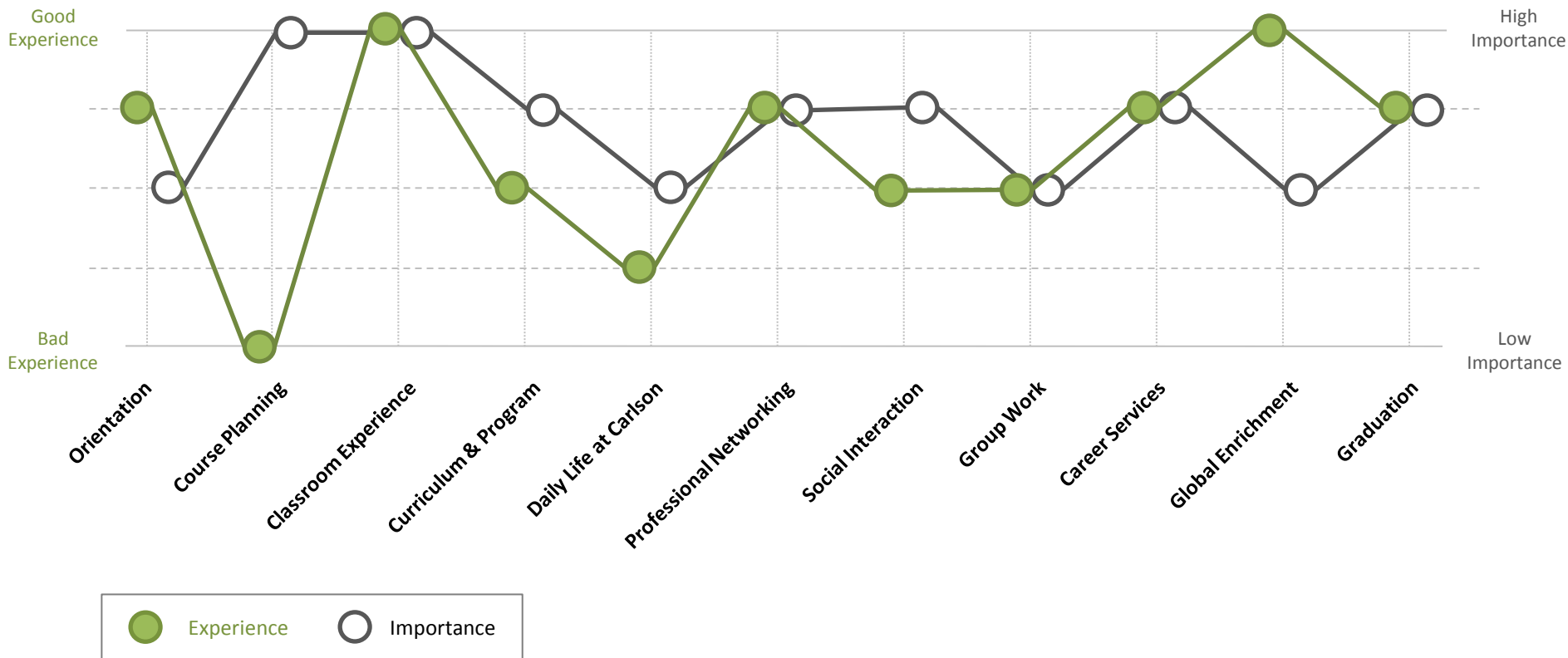
- *There's no substitute for the business education Carlson offers. The return on investment is huge.*
- *I have two kids, but I'd still like to do Global Enrichment. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.*
- *There's just no time to participate in clubs. Between work and classes, it's hard enough to maintain the friendships I have outside of school.*
- *The LAB/PSN members aren't like me, so I don't typically attend their events. I try to find other ways to connect with my classmates.*
- *I want my kids to understand the importance of school.*

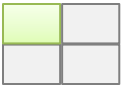




# Integrator Experience Map

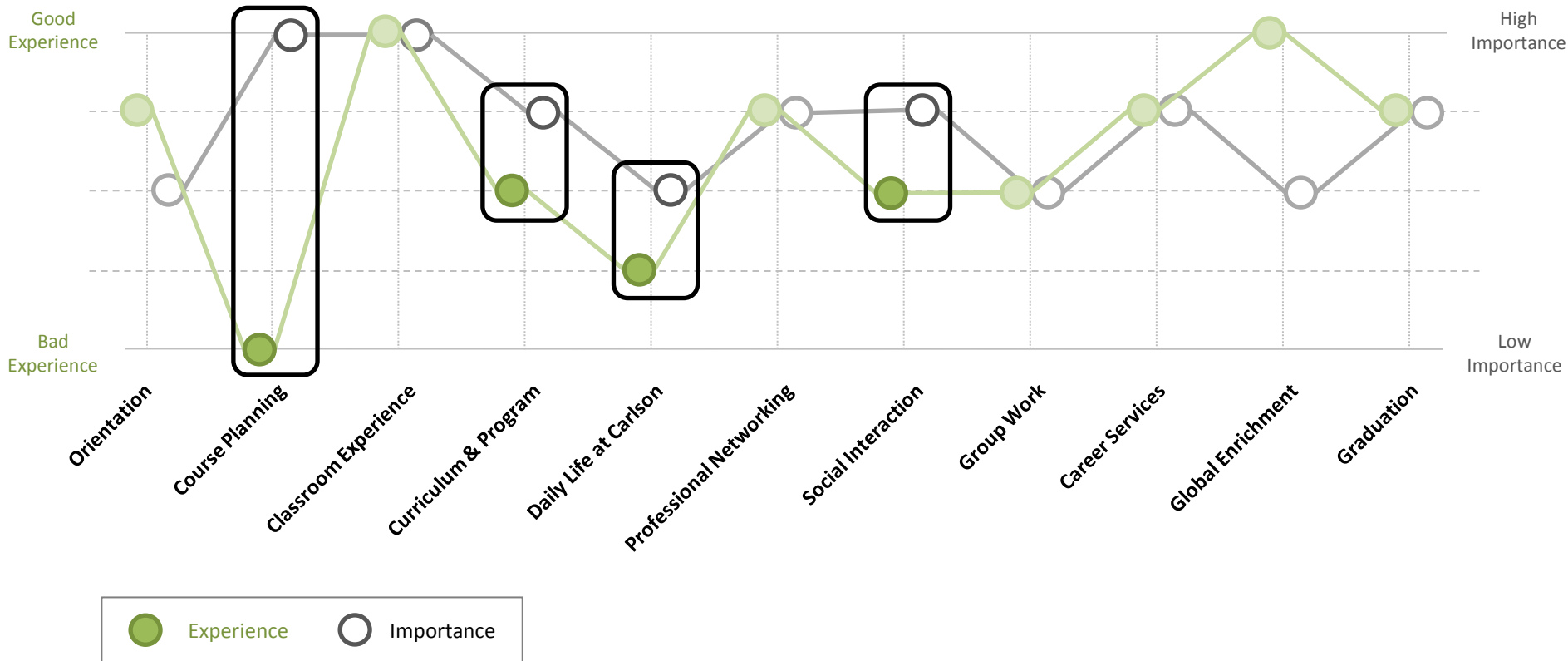
Integrators place high importance on the most impactful experiences of the program.

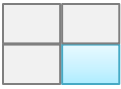




# Integrator Gap Analysis

Improvements must be made in four areas in order to satisfy the Integrator persona.





# Professional Networker Persona

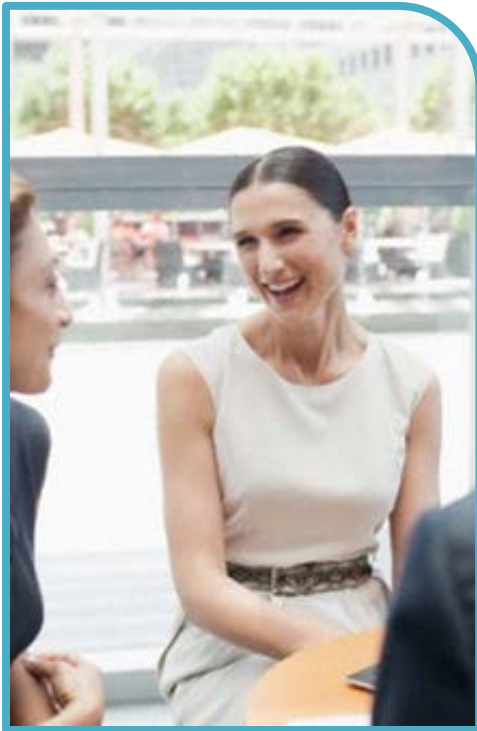
Professional Networkers are willing to carve out time for program offerings and view Carlson as an extension of their career.

## Motivations & Values

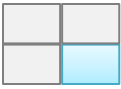
Focused on career acceleration, but open to exploration, Professional Networkers actively seek out opportunities to engage and connect with like-minded talent. They view the MBA program as a unique opportunity to meet other young professionals with diverse work experience.

## Key Behavioral Insights

- *At first, I dreaded the group projects, but now I really enjoy them; I make one or two business contacts in every group I work with.*
- *It's a little uncomfortable going to the full-time social events because I don't know anyone. I'd love the chance to get to know them though.*
- *I wish there was a Carlson-Company XYZ club, where I could network with other students who work at my company.*
- *I've actually helped three students get jobs at the company I work for. It's a great feeling.*
- *Though I'm not a "career switcher," the GBCC has been invaluable. I think all students should be required to meet with the GBCC at least once.*

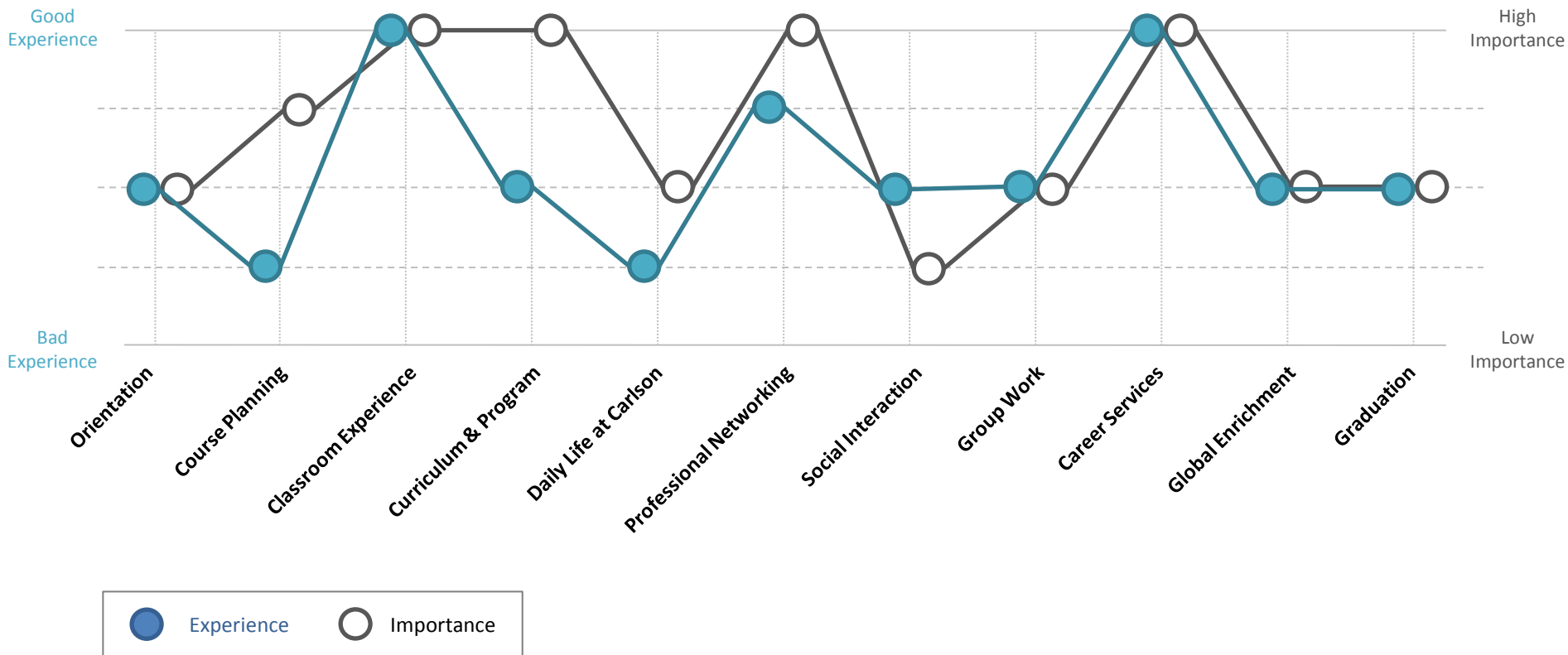


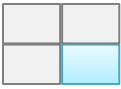




# Professional Networker Experience Map

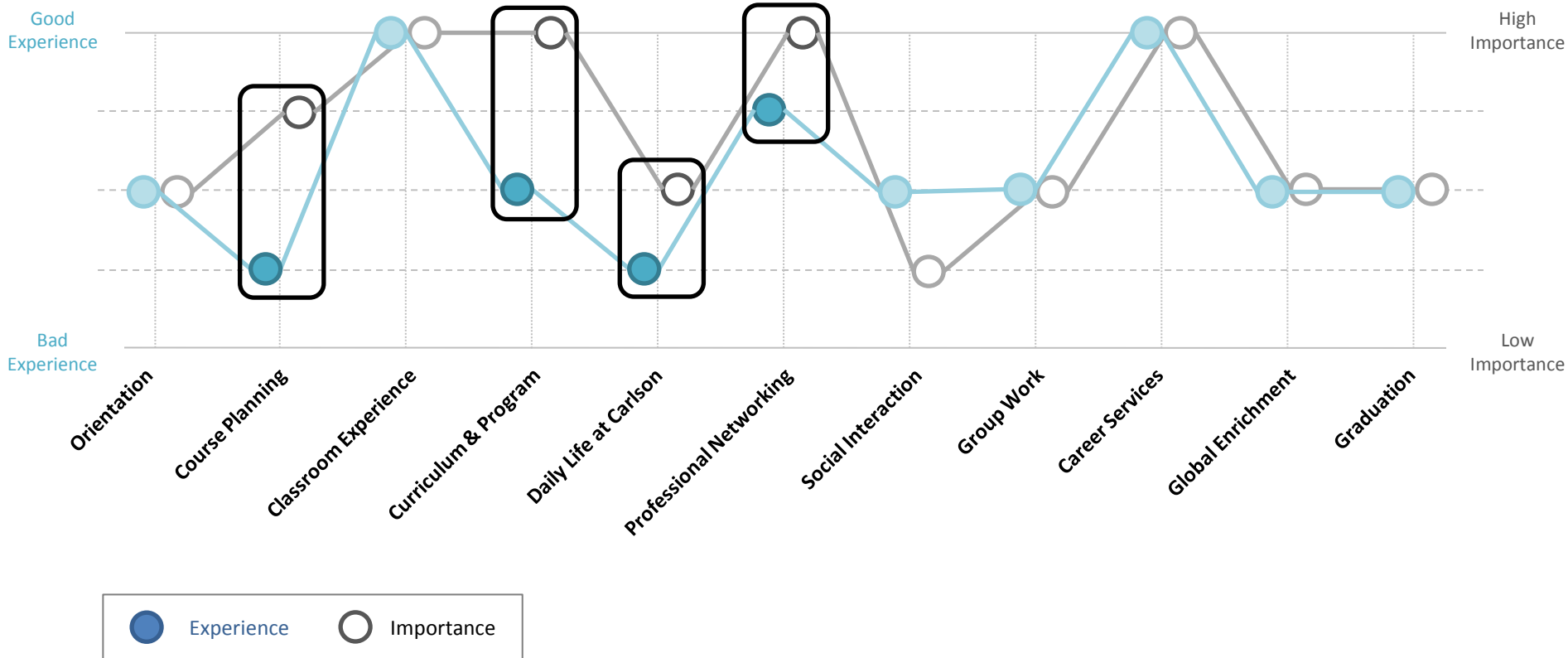
Professional Networkers have had a relatively good experience in the PTMBA program.





# Professional Networker Gap Analysis

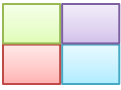
A gap analysis revealed four key areas in which to improve the experience of the Professional Networker persona.



# General Population Experiences

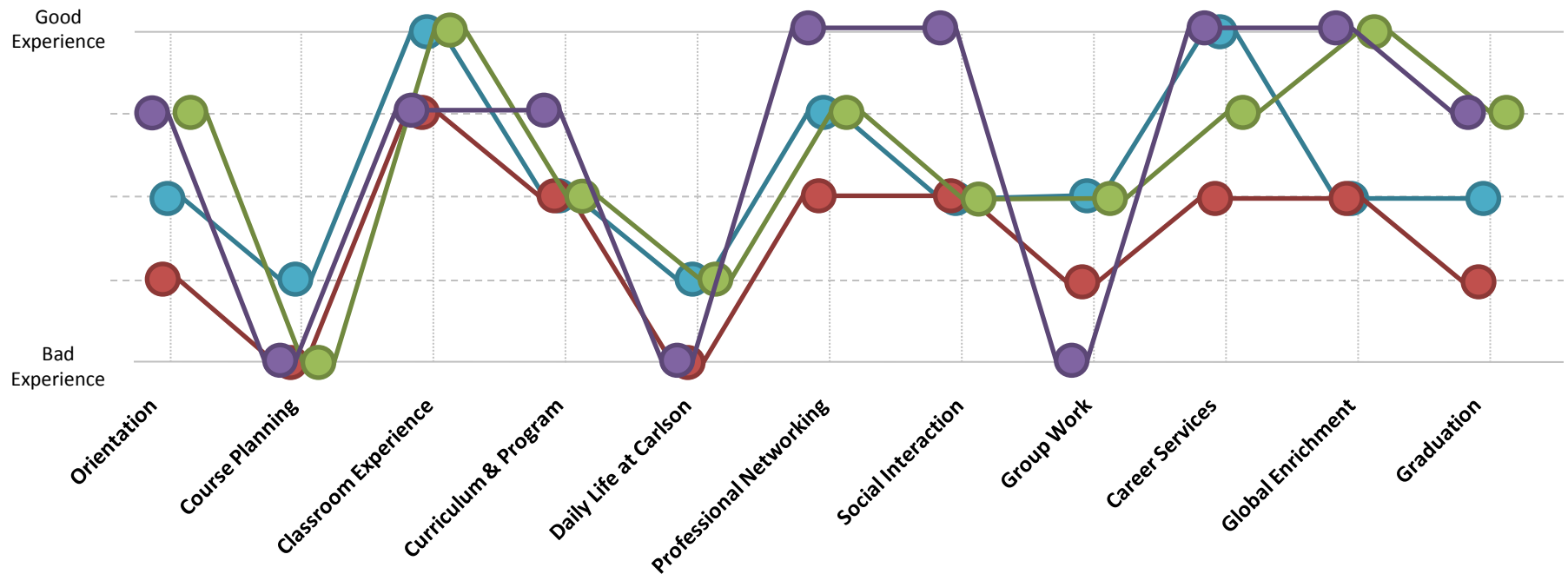
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Note that the general experience mapping does not consider the number (or weight) of students in a given persona. That level of analysis is beyond the scope of this project. The mapping presented here represents all personas equally.



# Aggregate Experience Mappings

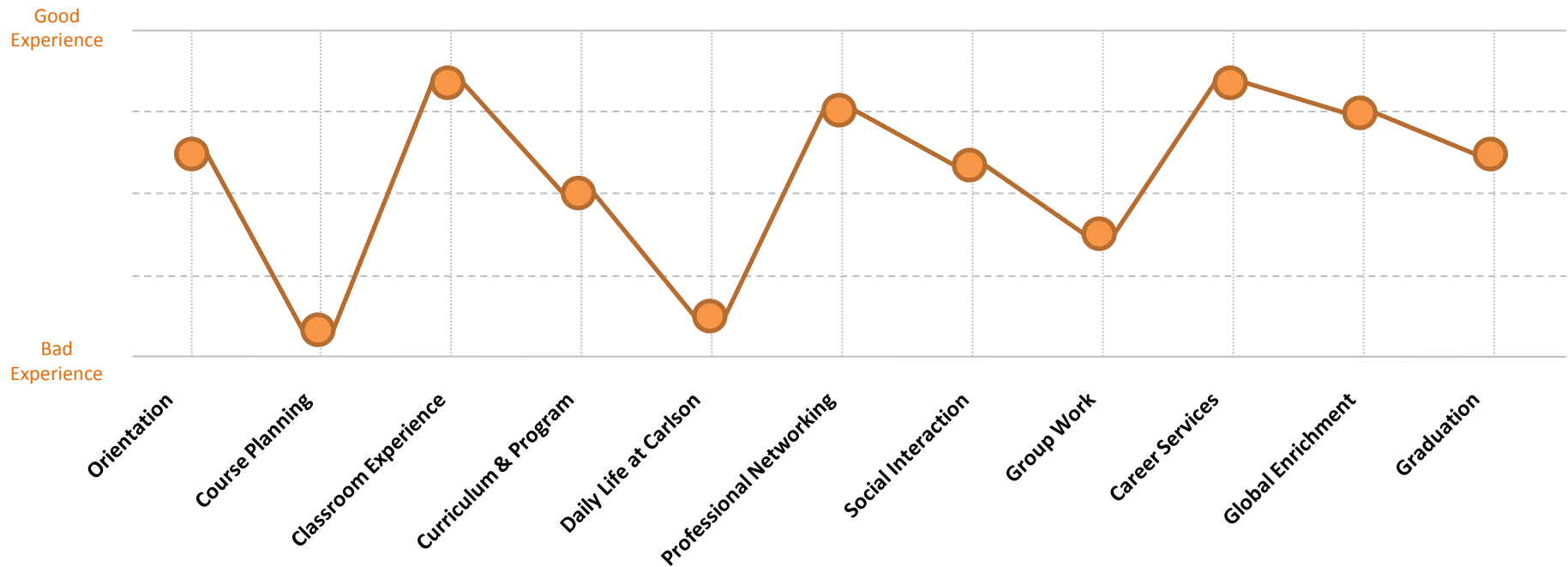
The four experiences plotted together help identify common low point themes that will help focus recommendations.

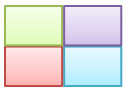




# General Population Experience Map

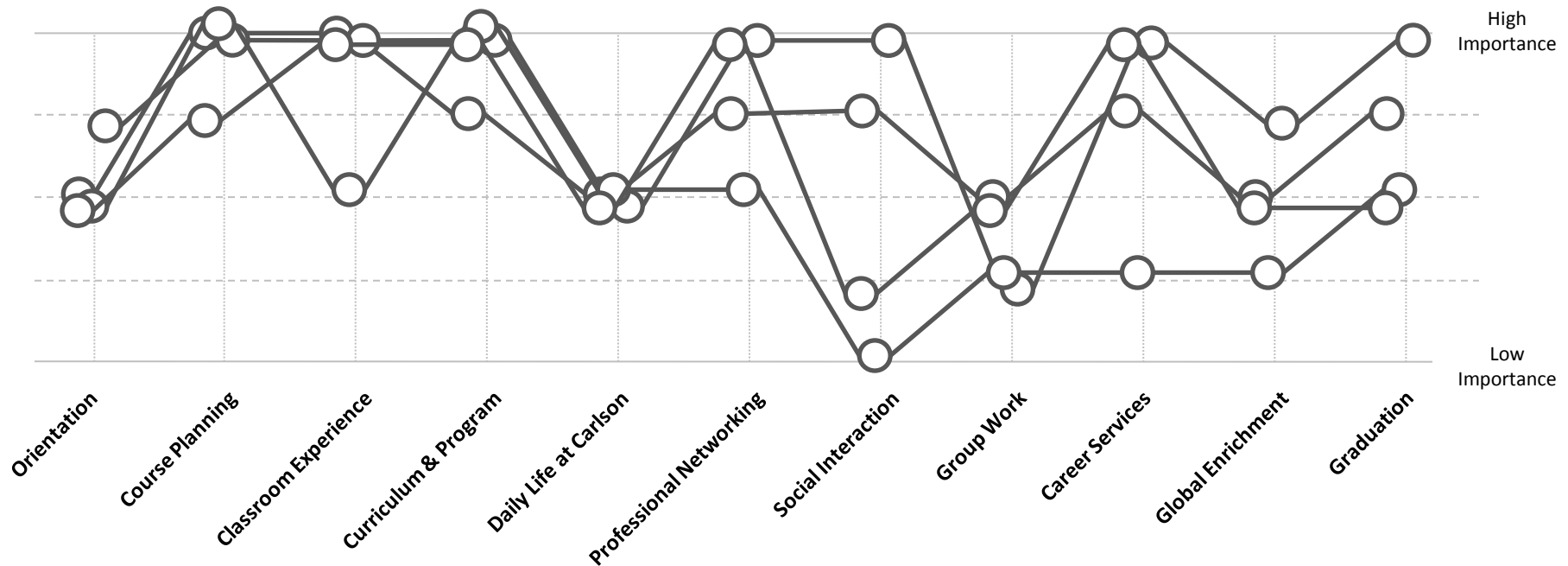
An “average” of the high and low experiences of each of the four personas reflects strengths and weaknesses of the program and PTMBA students’ values.





# Aggregate Importance Mappings

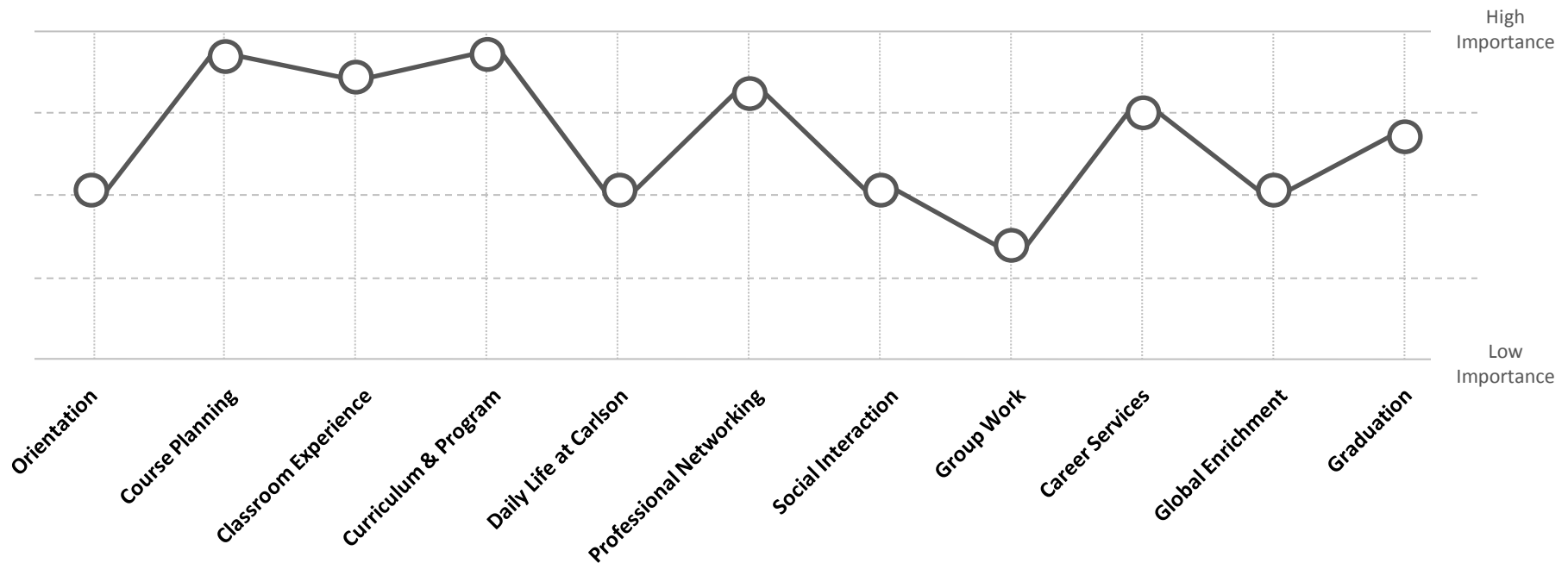
An aggregate graph of the personas' perception of importance of PTMBA experiences shows opportunities for improvement.





# General Population Importance Map

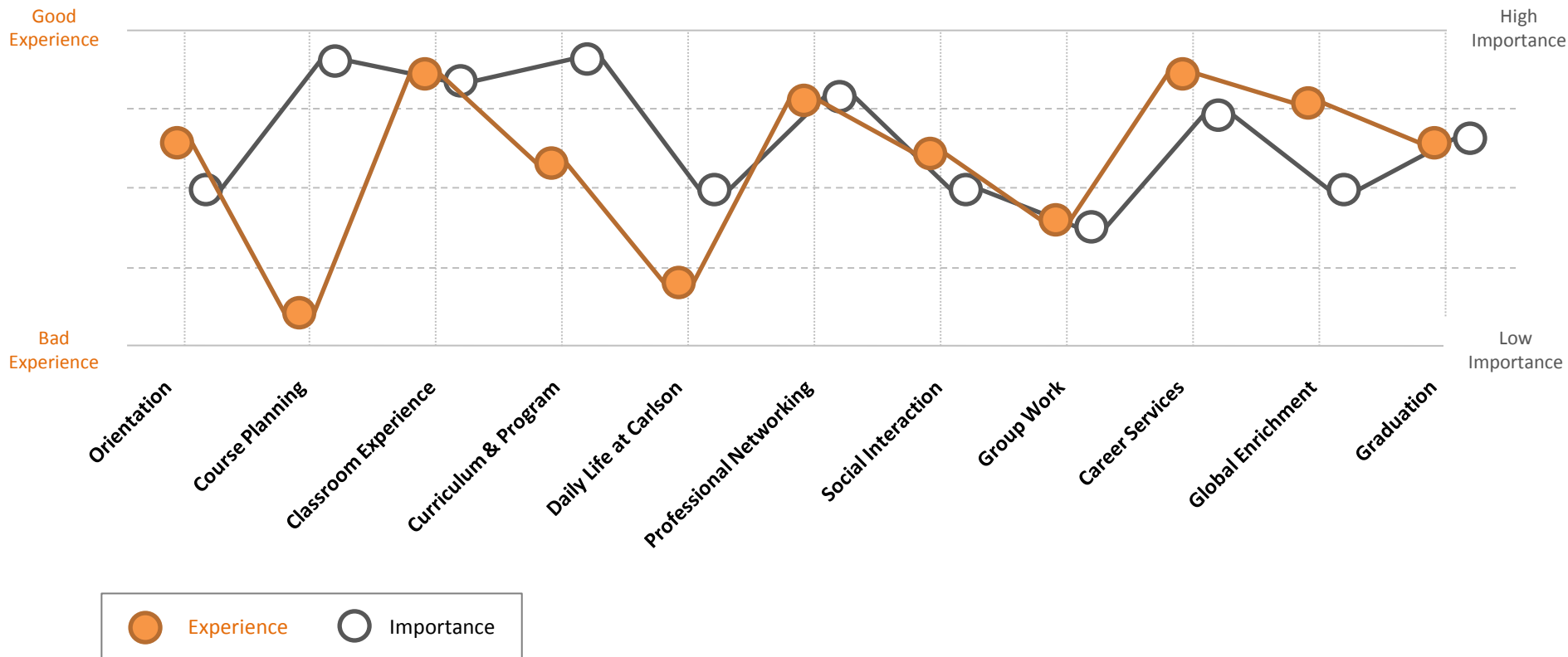
An aggregate graph of the personas' perception of importance of PTMBA experiences shows opportunities for improvement.





# General Population Experience Map

An “average” of the high and low experiences of each of the four personas reflects strengths and weaknesses of the program and PTMBA students’ values.

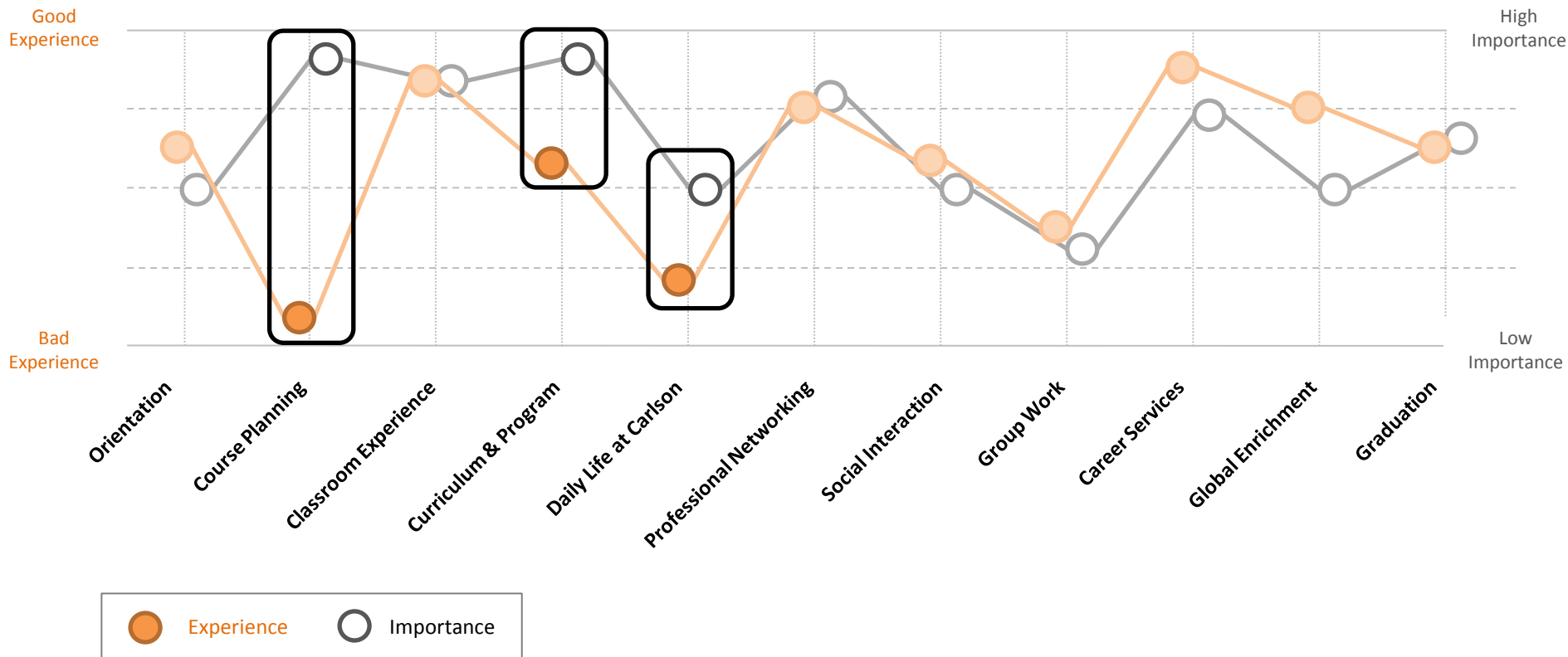






# General Population Gap Analysis

An “average” of the high and low experiences of each of the four personas reflects strengths and weaknesses of the program and PTMBA students’ values.

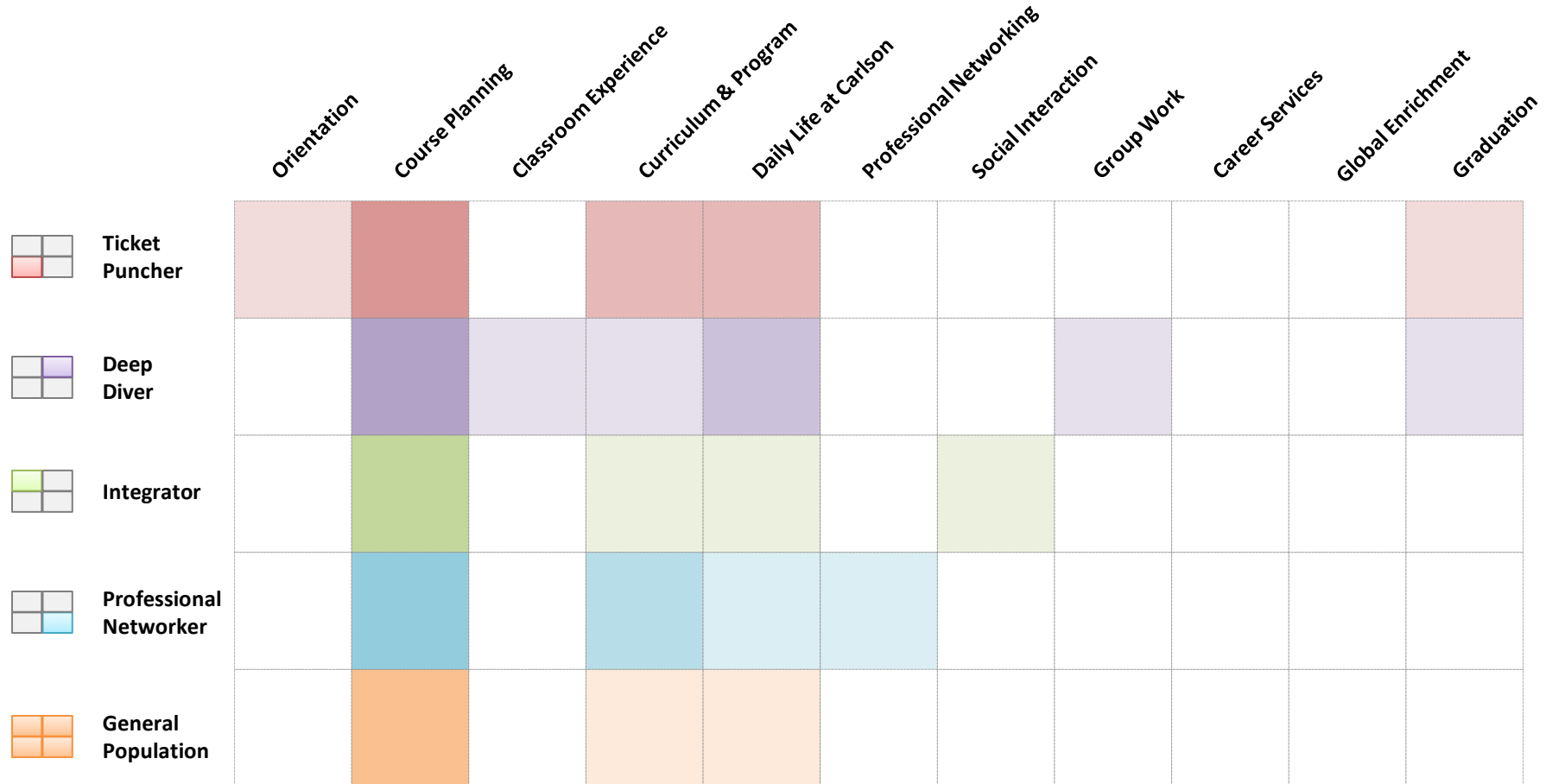


# Experience Gap Analysis

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# Experience Gap Analysis

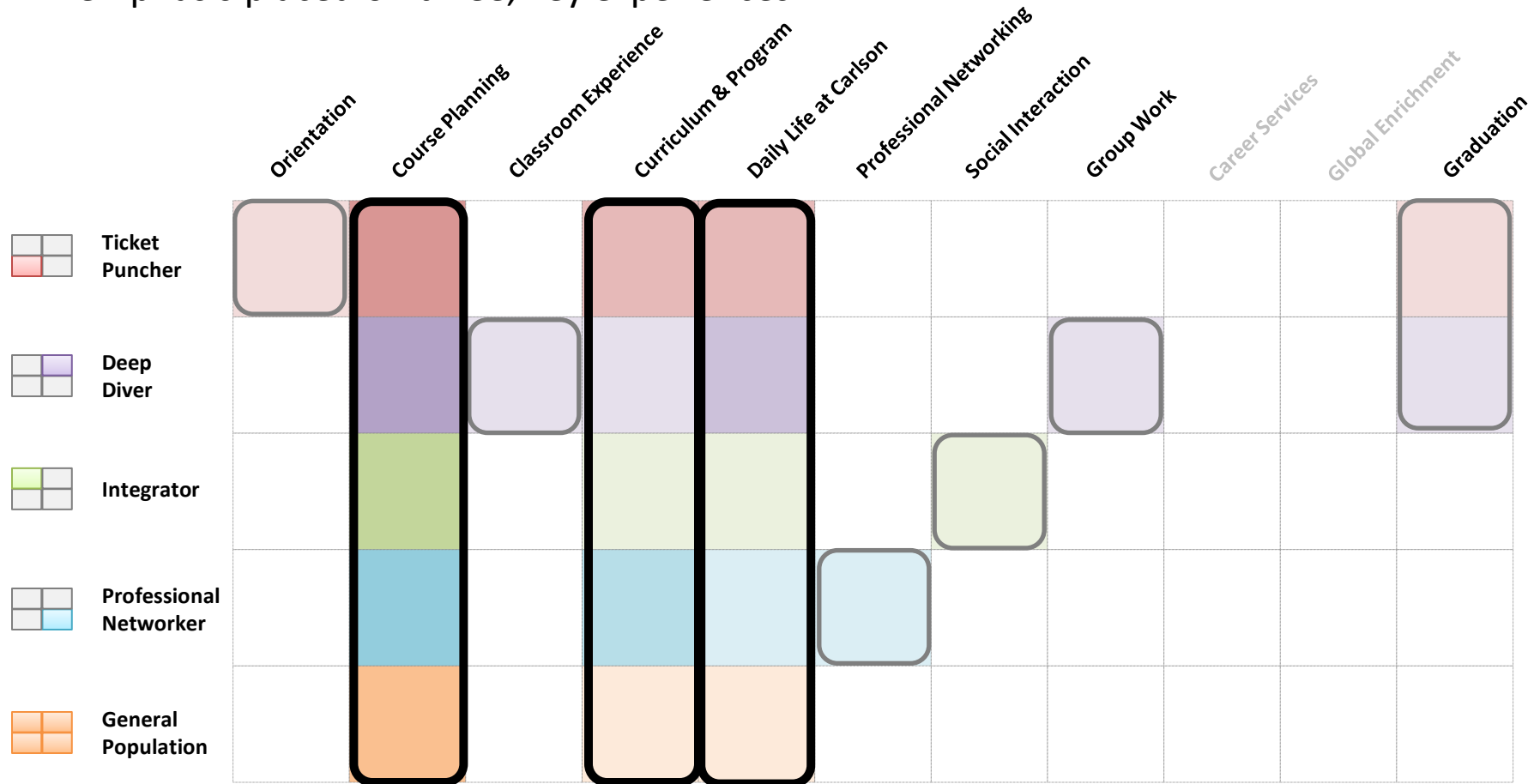
Based on gap analysis results, improvement efforts should be prioritized in shaded dissatisfaction areas indicated below.



\* Darker regions offer more improvement opportunity.

# Experience Gap Analysis

CVE recommendations target the nine highlighted key experience areas, with emphasis placed on three, key experiences.



\* Darker regions offer more improvement opportunity.

# Recommendations

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The following recommendations are ordered by key experience area.

The recommended actions may affect other areas, but the majority of change will be on the target area.

The recommended actions may require steps to be taken by Carlson at different points in the PT MBA experience. For example, a positive impact in changing students experience with Carlson services, may require better messaging during orientation.

Evidence quotes paraphrase and combine insights captured through student interviews.

# Orientation Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Orientation, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### **Scheduling**

- Taking time off of work for orientation is very inconvenient.

### **Content/Structure**

- There is too much breadth in orientation topics and not enough depth given the time constraints.
- Many orientation topics feel irrelevant for those with a business background.
- There is a perceived lack of career/recruitment information during orientation.

### **Send-Off**

- There is no follow-up/post-orientation recognition that students are beginning the program.
- No Carlson swag (track jackets, hoodies, etc).

## Evidence

- “All MILI classes are offered on Monday night. It makes no sense.”
- “Thank god for the Target spreadsheet. I’ve dodged a few bullets.”
- “Saturday AM classes are awful. But, they’re my only option.”
- “I had to take a couple classes out of order, due to scheduling issues. It was added pressure I didn’t need.”
- “I never seem to get the classes I want, since I don’t have priority.”



# Orientation Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Orientation.

## Idea Areas

### A. **Schedule Orientation to fit student needs.**

- Schedule orientation events during regular evening class session hours or over the weekend.

### B. **Make students feel welcome and recognized.**

- Send students' managers a letter welcoming their employee to the program.
- Send students a pre-orientation welcome packet with an orientation overview.

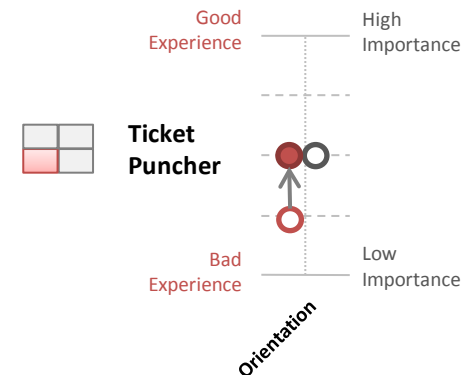
### C. **Revamp orientation to make it more interactive, fun, and practical.**

- Consider extending orientation to a multi-day event.
- Invite family/significant others to a "family and friends" Orientation Kick-Off event.
- Make the content practical and student life oriented, avoid "too soon" content like library research sessions.

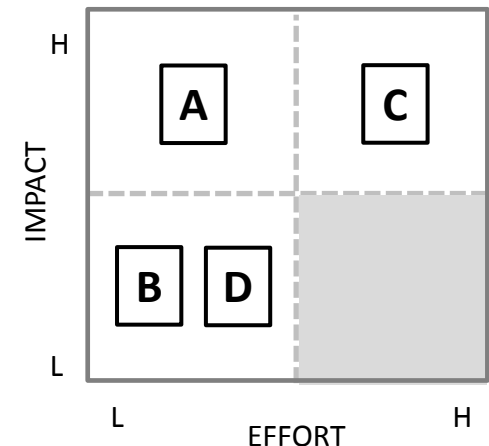
### D. **Supplement with a post-orientation packet and website.**

- Create a PTMBA-wiki, that houses short orientation "how-to" videos, PTMBA-specific content, and campus life information.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Course Planning Pain Points

Course planning is the key experience area that requires the most improvement because of a lack of transparency and content pain points.

## Pain Points

### Transparency

- Lack of PTMBA student knowledge around professor quality and course ratings.

### Content/Structure

- Core classes fall on the same day/time.
- Only one section of a class is available on one night—too much exclusivity.

### Online Courses

- Mixed reactions regarding online courses—many PTMBA students fear that moving more online will dilute the brand

### Faculty

- Perception that the best professors only teach during the day.

## Evidence

- “I had to take a half-day PTO.”
- “Instead of a 4-6 hr. session during the day, it should be 3 hours in the evening- like a regular class.”
- “Some people signed in then walked out. They didn’t miss out on much.”
- “Orientation was not all that valuable, though it might be of value to someone who doesn’t have an undergrad business degree.”
- “Why aren’t there any companies present at orientation? I want that interaction right out of the gate.”





# Course Planning Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Orientation.

## Idea Areas

### A. Bring the classes to the students.

- Offer class sessions at company headquarters such as Target, Cargill, General Mills, etc.

### B. Offer alternative class formats.

- Host a two day seminar over the weekend, in lieu of a traditional two credit course.
- Open afternoon classes (3:45PM-5:25 PM sections) to PTMBA students.

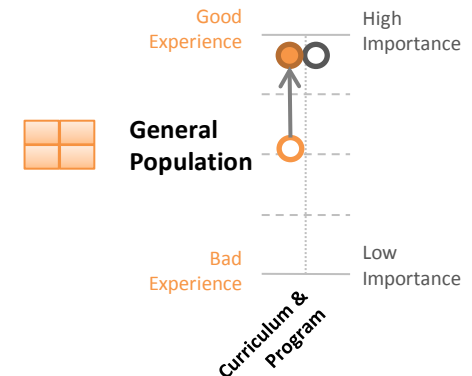
### C. Make teacher reviews more accessible, and more transparent.

- PTMBA Programs Office to sponsor a student-nominated “Professor of the Month” initiative.

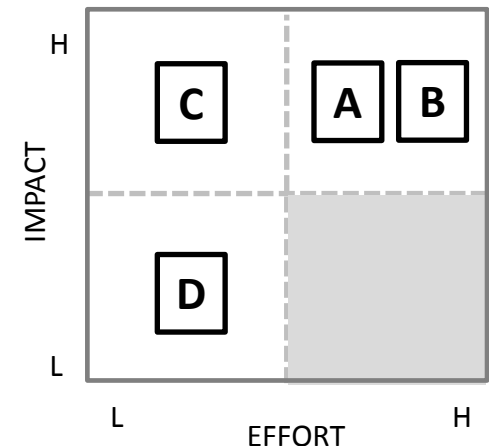
### D. Provide more detailed course information prior to registration.

- Include more detailed course information in the OneStop course guide.
- Publish class syllabi on Carlson Intranet prior to registration.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Classroom Experience Pain Points

Interviews revealed the pain points related to a poor classroom experience include frustration with grading, class structure and a lack of flexibility.

## Pain Points

### **Class Structure**

- Typical lecture style structure is outdated and inappropriate for the PTMBA audience.

### **Grading**

- The grading curve creates an unnecessary competitive atmosphere.
- Student desire the “A,” but become disengaged because of the effects of the curve.

### **Peers**

- Frustration with varying levels of engagement across peers.

### **General Logistics**

- Some professors don’t provide class breaks.

### **Lack of Flexibility**

- No alternative to make up for a missed class.

## Evidence

- “Short, in-class group work is great and it leads to conversations.”
- “Break is great. I enjoy chatting with my peers, but we don’t always get one and that’s annoying.”
- “People who don’t pay attention in class drive me nuts.”
- “It’s so frustrating when you just have to travel for work and you can’t make up missing a lecture.”
- “I want an A. I feel like the curve keeps me down and holds others up. I don’t want that and I don’t want competition.”



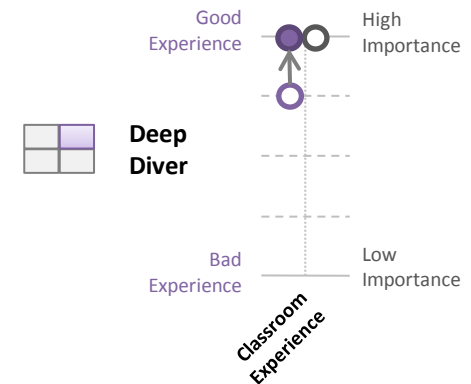
# Classroom Experience Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Orientation.

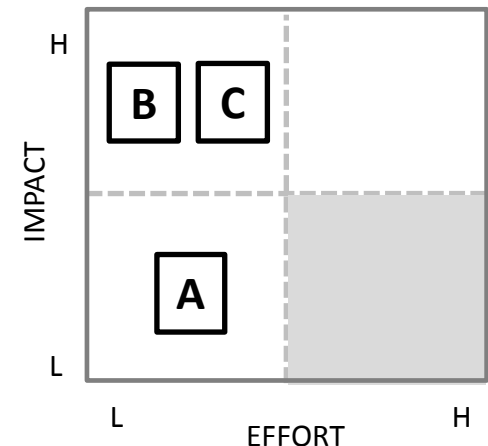
## Idea Areas

- A. Require faculty members to provide a break during class time and leverage the time effectively.**
  - Provide a 15 minute break during evening classes.
  - Create an enjoyable experience during break by providing weekly first-come, first-served beverages and snacks for little/no cost in the atrium.
  - Bring in corporate sponsors, monthly, to provide snacks and encourage networking activities.
- B. Promote student interaction during class.**
  - Incorporate small-group activities during classes to encourage discussion.
  - Replace a class session with a guest lecture panel of industry experts.
  - Implement “blitz” in-class case competitions.
- C. Utilize more technology in evening lectures.**
  - Record all lectures and house in Moodle for a short period of time after class session.
  - Allow students to Skype/FaceTime into lectures.
  - Use iTunes Podcasts/iTunes U to record and archive lectures.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Curriculum & Program Pain Points

Interviews uncovered a number of pain points related to the curriculum and program, which must be addressed in order for the student experience to improve.

## Pain Points

### **Lack of Recognition/Priority**

- PT is an afterthought of administration/faculty.
- The PT program subsidizes the FT program.

### **Faculty**

- PTMBA faculty should have some industry experience.
- Varying expectations of work loads and priorities, depending on the faculty member.

### **Overlapping Curricula from Course to Course**

- Duplicate information—whether in a course in the PTMBA program, or from a course taken during undergraduate career.

### **Grading Curve**

- The current grading policy penalizes.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Not enough application-based/experiential learning.
- Current waiver policy is a hindrance/frustration.

## Evidence

- “Some lectures are too academic. The PTMBA faculty ought to have at least some industry experience, and bring share it with the class.”
- “I heard Professor Zaheer and Professor Shaver were ranked in the top-50 this year. Too bad I’ll never get to take their classes.”
- “My M&A class was the exact same content as FINA4241. I learned nothing new.”
- “The waiver process is awful. It seems like the students who complain the most get the most classes waived; it’s not fair.”
- “The grading curve keeps the top down, and rewards the poor performers.”

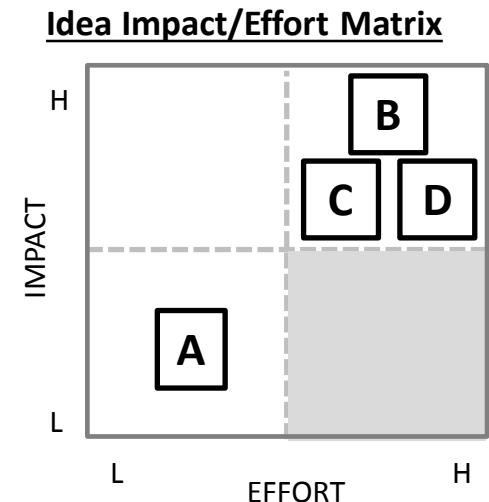
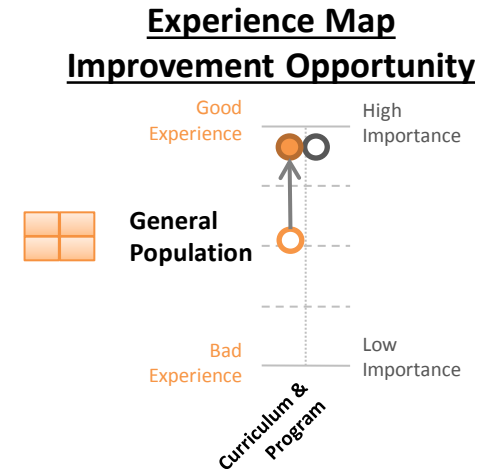


# Curriculum & Program Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with the current Curriculum and Program.

## Idea Areas

- A. Ensure each course has unique curricular and learning objectives.**
  - Re-evaluate current course offerings to reduce theory overlap.
  - Provide a “test-out” option to waive course credits.
- B. Provide more experiential learning opportunities.**
  - Create a program modeled after the Graduate Volunteer Consultants group.
  - Incorporate unique, timely real-world cases into every class.
  - Create a “capstone” course similar to the Enterprise program model.
- C. Offer an opt-in cohort structure.**
  - Form a cohort/series of cohorts based on similar interests, workload expectations, and grading expectations.
- D. Expand the current faculty pool.**
  - Persuade world-renowned faculty (ex. Prof. Zaheer) to teach a class every two years, in a large auditorium setting.
  - Encourage more “industry-experts” from local companies to teach/guest lecture.
  - Give PT students greater access to FT faculty members.



# Daily Life Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Daily Life at Carlson, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### Facility

- Environment is unfavorable for networking, studying, etc.
- Should help to foster a sense of community within the PTMBA class.
- Unhealthy, inaccessible food options in Carlson cafeteria.

### Information Systems

- Confusing and overwhelming number of websites/online resources.

### Transportation and Commute

- Parking is consistently a pain point because of the exit/paying process.
- Commute from work can be frustrating and stressful.

## Evidence

- “For God’s sake, give me something cheap and healthy to eat.”
- “The atrium is gloomy and depressing at night.”
- “I parked in the ramp once, never again. I’m not sure where else there is to park.”
- “There is no bus that goes downtown after class.”
- “There are like 7 different websites I have to use as a student. The intranet is terribly confusing.”
- “I would love a locker and a better set of work spaces.”
- “There really isn’t anywhere totally awesome to network and hang out in Carlson.”



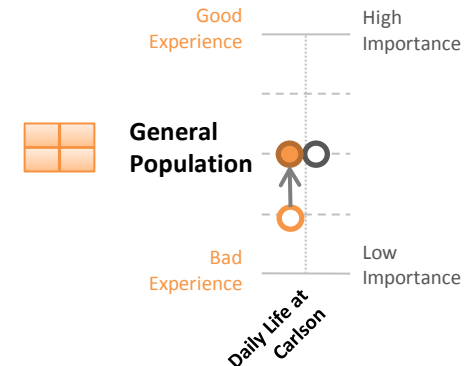
# Daily Life Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Daily Life at Carlson.

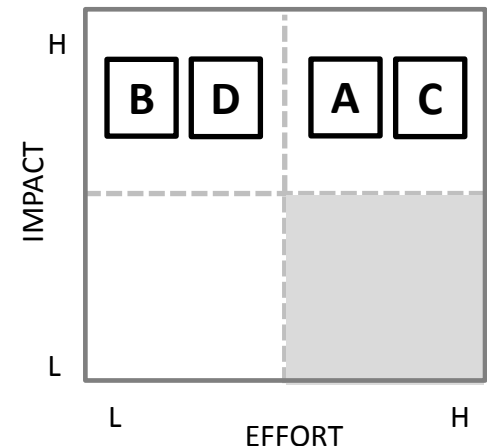
## Idea Areas

- A. Create a physical space, exclusive to PTMBAs, specifically for networking and socializing.**
  - Build a PTMBA lounge that is virtual-team/telecommuter friendly and conducive to networking.
  - Set up high-top tables in the atrium at 5PM.
- B. Provide additional dining options.**
  - Implement a group ordering system from local restaurants.
  - Station food trucks on 4<sup>th</sup> St. before class and during breaks.
- C. Address parking ramp bottlenecks.**
  - Provide flat rate parking fees after 4PM, and pay as you enter.
  - Place pay stations inside the skyways.
  - Pay as you go system linked with U Cards and contract parking exits.
- D. Provide free transportation to and from corporate headquarters.**
  - Shuttles departing from offices twice daily, and returning at 9:15 PM.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Professional Networking Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Professional Networking, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### Company Interactions

- Too few touch points and face-to-face opportunities with companies.

### General Networking

- Lack of both inter- and intra-company professional networking groups.
- Very little peer-to-peer networking.
- Absence of functional/career aspirational networking groups/clubs.
- Infrequent connection with alumni.

### Time Conflicts

- No “ideal” time to host networking events because of PTMBA students’ schedules.

## Evidence

- “I have tried to work with alumni relations, but they dropped the ball and are just flakey.”
- “I want a company focused student organization so I can network with my peers.”
- “I try to network with my peers as much as possible, right now class and PSN are the best ways to do that. Wish there was more.”
- “I’m all finance all the time. I want to meet more people interested in that.”
- “I’m really disappointed at the lack of companies on campus. At Michigan (undergrad), there were company networking opportunities almost every day.”





# Professional Networking Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Professional Networking.

## Idea Areas

### A. Develop onsite networking events.

- Work with companies to host open invitation networking events onsite.

### B. Put the power in company-oriented student ambassadors.

- Assign a student ambassador role to companies with an historically large PTMBA student population.
- Create company-focused student organizations.

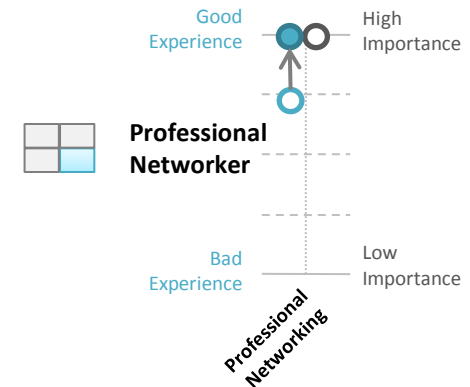
### C. Establish student networking groups.

- Create an opt-in, student-run networking group, following the couchsurfing.com model.

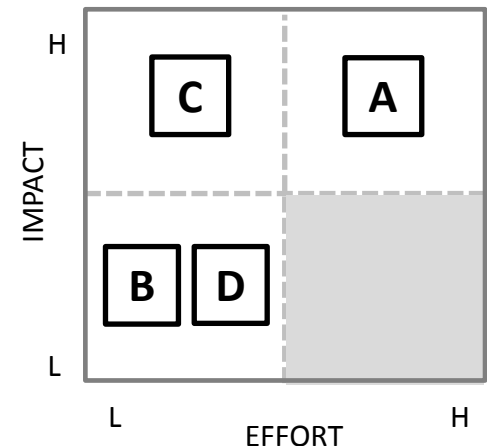
### D. Leverage technology to facilitate student networking.

- Make more effective use of LinkedIn, Facebook and social media.
- Start useful opt-in email lists (ex: PTMBAforsale@umn.edu) that connect students organically.
- Compile student contact information in a simple Google Doc.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Social Interaction Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Social Interaction, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### Current Offerings

- Existing perception that neither LAB nor PSN cater to the average student.
- Absence of diverse interest offerings.
- Few current offerings are open to family/significant others.
- Lack of interest-based community events
- Missing information regarding creating a club/organizing a social event.

### Community/Culture

- General lack of camaraderie across the PTMBA classes.
- Program doesn't build in time for socializing.

## Evidence

- “No one participates in clubs. There’s no time.”
- “The LAB people aren’t like me.”
- “The low point of the program for me has been the lack of camaraderie.”
- “The vast majority of students are just not interested in making friends.”
- “I’ve developed some relationships through group work, but that’s about it.”
- “I became good friends with my Global Enrichment group. We still hang out.”



# Social Interaction Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Orientation.

## Idea Areas

### A. Leverage Global Enrichment

- Encourage PT students to participate in the Global Enrichment program during their first year at Carlson.

### B. Plan Carlson/PTMBA happy hours near corporate/office locations

- Arrange happy hours in locations around the Metro area—ex: West End, St. Paul, Downtown, Uptown, etc.

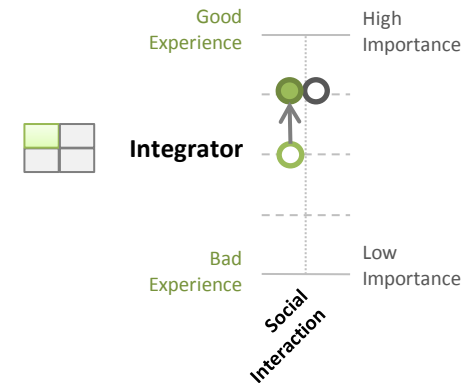
### C. Establish a secluded, PTMBA-exclusive lounge area in Carlson or Hanson

- Serve complimentary wine, beer, and appetizers before class and during breaks.

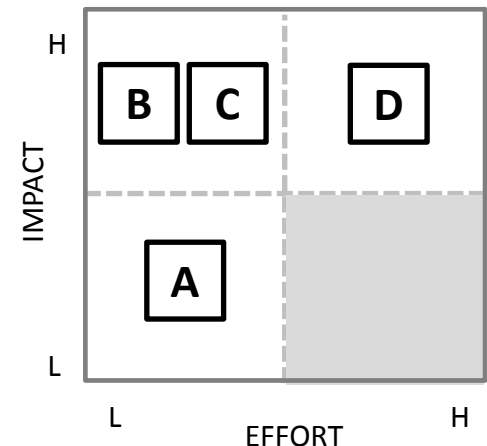
### D. Host one or two large signature events each year

- Model after the FT Charity Auction.
- Family-oriented summer picnic/field day in TCF Bank Stadium.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Group Work Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Group Work, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### **Misalignment of Goals/Expectations**

- Varying levels of commitment across team members.
- Varying levels of grade expectations across team members.

### **Skill Set Gaps**

- Lack of project, technology, and time management skills in teams.

### **Role of Group Work in the Overall Program**

- Group projects can feel irrelevant or unnecessary—ex: group papers.
- Majority of students work in groups all day, and don't feel a need to repeat this experience at school.

### **Logistics**

- Inability to access school email and/or team files at work.
- Difficulty finding time to meet outside of class.

## Evidence

- “There is always that bad apple in group work who just doesn't put in any effort.”
- “It's tough for me when not everyone is willing to work for an A.”
- “Some people end up emailing the same document back and forth 70 times instead of using Dropbox!”
- “Some group work just doesn't make sense. How often does your boss ask your team to write a paper with 5 other people...”



# Group Work Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Group Work.

## Idea Areas

### A. Change the focus of group work.

- Avoid group papers and “research a topic” assignments.
- Structure group work around business problems or cases.
- Leverage short in-class group work as much as possible.

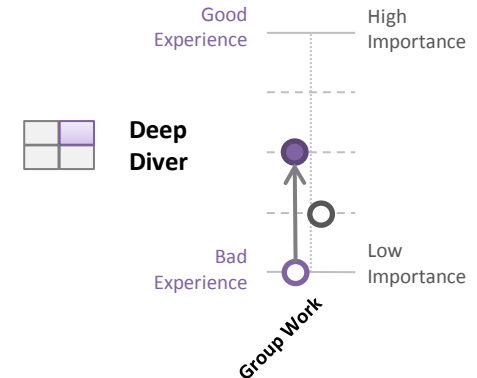
### B. Provide the proper tool set to make group work easier.

- Short orientation session on group work tools and best practices (Team Charters, Dropbox, Doodle, and Google Docs).
- Reference resources online and in an orientation handout.

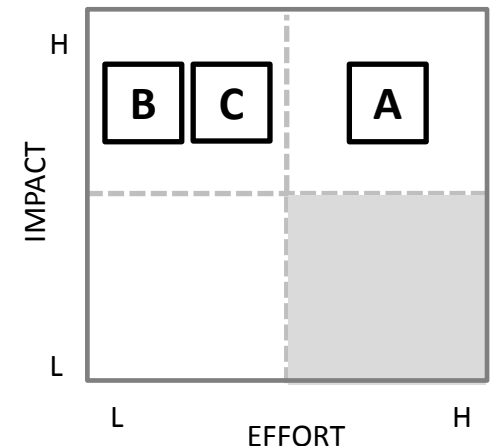
### C. Facilitate group self-selection.

- Provide a team sign-up tool through which students are group by academic goals and availability. Vision as a simple Google doc, a website, or a Moodle plug-in

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Career Services Pain Points

While gap analysis around Career Services does not indicate any strong pain points, the CVE team believes that noteworthy misconceptions warrant some attention.

## Pain Points

### **Lack of Understanding**

- Students perceive that the GBCC does not apply to them as “career accelerators.”

### **Perceptions of Services**

- Students perceive that the GBCC offerings cater more to full time students.

## Evidence

- “If the GBCC and companies wanted part-time students they would have OCR events that fit our schedules.”
- “The GBCC doesn’t apply to me because I am not trying to change careers, just move up.”
- “I am locked in with my company for the next two years so why would I use the GBCC?”
- “The GBCC is designed for full time students because they are all changing careers.”



# Career Services Idea Areas

A few ideas surrounding messaging, engagement, and peer interaction will help improve the career services experience.

## Idea Areas

### A. Require engagement upfront.

- Require a GBCC meeting during every new student's first semester. Have student's identify their career goals.
- Highlight relevant services and success stories.

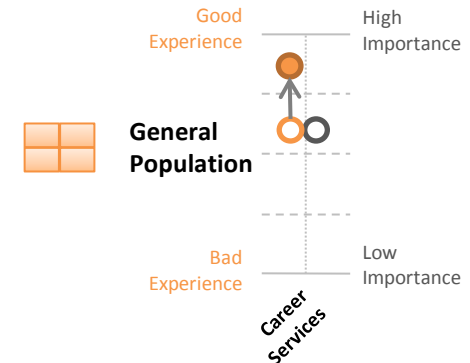
### B. Leverage current students.

- Have current students from around the switcher / accelerator spectrum speak at orientation.
- Share a set of different GBCC success stories.

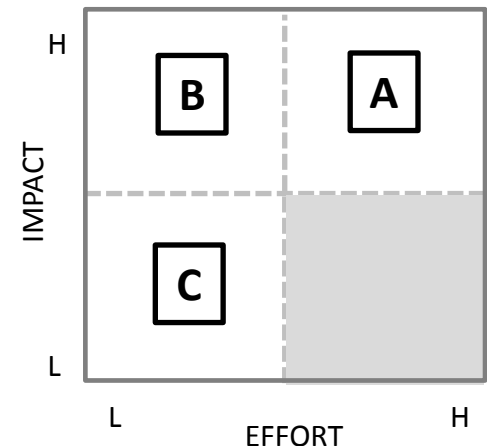
### C. Host "information intervention" during break.

- Host brief sessions during class time breaks.
- Highlight key GBCC services.
- Address misconceptions directly.
- Provide coffee and snacks to create an enjoyable break.

## Experience Map Improvement Opportunity



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Graduation Pain Points

Interviews have uncovered a number of pain points related to Graduation, which must be addressed in order for students to have a better MBA experience.

## Pain Points

### **Pre-Graduation Communications**

- No “action items” in the months preceding graduation.

### **Scheduling**

- Graduation held during the workday.

### **Lack of Recognition**

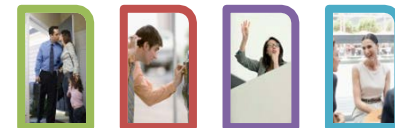
- Recognition is missing at both work and school.

### **Follow-up**

- Perceived loss of career service offerings after graduation.
- Disconnected alumni base.

## Evidence

- “Why would I take off of work to go to graduation?”
- “My boss doesn’t even know I graduated.”
- “I only get two weeks off a year I’d rather not use that time for school, but I have to.”
- “I am worried about losing access to the GBCC before I land a new job after graduation.”





# Graduation Idea Areas

Based on a few of the problem areas, several recommendations can be implemented to reduce frustration with Graduation.

## Idea Areas

### A. **Schedule Graduation to fit student needs.**

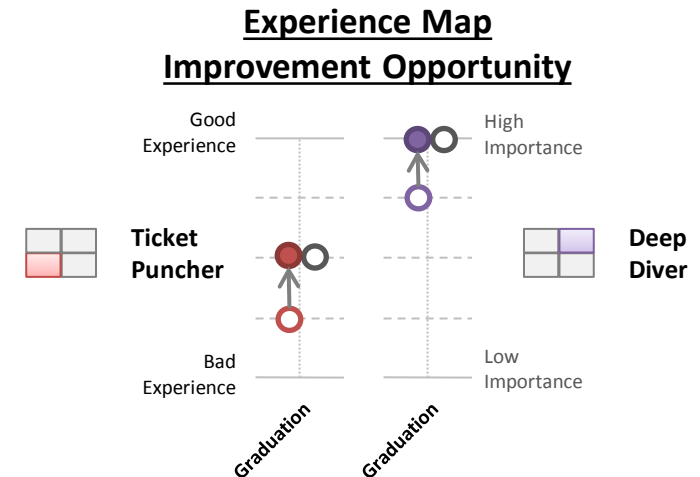
- Ensure Graduation is held on either an evening or weekend.

### B. **Recognize student achievement.**

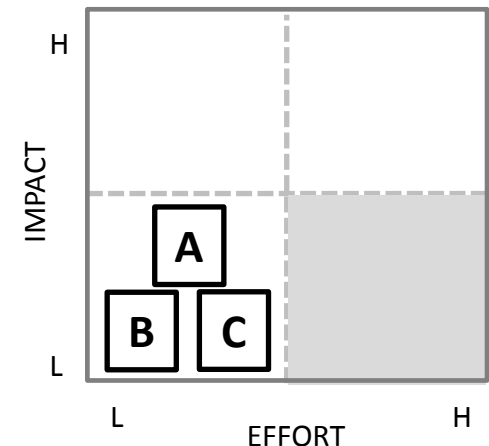
- Send a letter to employer upon completion of the final class.
- Hold a celebratory picnic in honor of PT student achievement.

### C. **Maintain contact and services.**

- Schedule a GBCC follow-up call one to three months after graduation.



## Idea Impact/Effort Matrix



# Suggested Next Steps

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# Suggested Next Steps

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CVE research and findings in hand, Carlson should consider moving forward with the following next steps.

1. Use surveys to **stratify the PTMBA population** and understand the breakdown of personas.
  - Sample survey questions in Appendix.
2. Identify target numbers for personas and **design admissions** to capture desired candidates.
  - A general idea of the number of each persona will help shape the program and allow Carlson to be strategic with future service offerings.
3. Explore a **cohort model**.
  - Research indicates that cohorts may be beneficial—if kept as an opt-in alternative—due to the size and diversity of the student population.
4. Adjust **the lens** through which PTMBA students are viewed.
  - Carlson must start thinking in terms of its audience.
    - “Would this really make the Ticket Puncher happy?” “Our audience is primarily Deep Divers so they would prefer...”

# CARLSON *Ventures* ENTERPRISE